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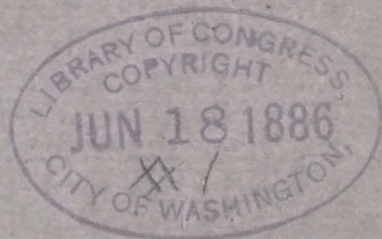
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HER OWN DOING

A Novel



BY W. E. NORRIS

AUTHOR OF "MATRIMONY" "ADRIAN VIDAL" "THIRLBY HALL"
"HEAPS OF MONEY" ETC.

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HER OWN DOING.

CHAPTER I.

WHETHER it is a recommendation or a drawback to a health resort that all the world is to be met with there is, of course, a question of individual taste. The majority declare it to be the latter, while their conduct would seem to show that they consider it to be the former—a kind of inconsistency not uncommon among majorities, political and other. One fine February afternoon a gentleman who professed the sentiments of the majority from sincere conviction was walking slowly along the sunny road which borders the sea at Cannes. He had arrived only the night before, and during the quarter of an hour which had elapsed since he had emerged from his hotel he had already encountered some half-dozen acquaintances. A man must be poor indeed in acquaintances to be in that place at that season of the year without encountering them in overwhelming

numbers, and Captain Brooke, whose acquaintance was a tolerably large one, should have been prepared for the shakes of the hand and the friendly greetings which arrested him at every other step. Possibly he was so prepared; but that he was not gratified was made evident by the bored and irritated expression of his handsome young face, the slight frown upon his forehead, and the brief and perfunctory fashion in which he responded to the queries addressed to him. He was, in fact, preoccupied with thoughts of his own, and did not want to enter into conversation with these good people. Besides, each and all of them said exactly the same things in almost exactly the same words—which would have been provoking under any circumstances. “Hullo, Brooke! Back from Egypt? Awfully sorry to hear of your being knocked over. Not much the worse, I hope? Come here to recruit, I suppose.” And then they asked him whether he was going to Mrs. Somebody’s dance that night, and he replied that he was not; after which their stock of subjects appeared to be exhausted, and they passed on, with an encouraging murmur of “See you again soon.”

“See me again soon!” growled this ungrateful young man; “I should rather think they would! How is one to help being seen in such a nutshell

of a place? It's a hundred times worse than the Park!"

He seated himself on a bench, with his back towards the promenaders and his face towards the blue sea and the beautiful Esterelles Islands, at which he did not look. It seemed, indeed, that he cared to look at nothing except his watch, which he consulted about every five minutes, and restored to his pocket as often with an impatient sigh. Half-hours, when counted after this fashion, contain a vastly greater number of minutes than the thirty of which they consist according to the reckoning of Cocker, and if Captain Brooke had not been a man of much quiet resolution he must have quitted his post long before four o'clock. He had, however, decided in his own mind that between four and five would be the proper time for paying a visit which he contemplated, and it was not until the clocks in the town began to strike the former hour that he jumped up with alacrity and, hailing a passing *voiture de place*, asked the driver whether he knew the Villa des Châtaigniers.

"*Si je la connais !*" answered the man somewhat disdainfully; for indeed the villa in question is one of the largest of the seven hundred, more or less, which have sprung up around the little town dis-

covered by Lord Brougham scarcely half a century ago.

“Then *allez* there as quick as you can,” returned the Englishman, whose knowledge of foreign languages was limited, and who had never been able to see what was to be gained by increasing it.

A short and somewhat steep drive brought him to his destination, an imposing edifice, standing in the midst of what, for Cannes, might be called extensive grounds. The sloping garden was prettily laid out, and gay with a profusion of roses and other flowers; the drive was bordered by rare and costly shrubs, and it was plain that the tenant of this desirable property must be not only a rich, but a very rich, person. A butler and two footmen came to the door to say that Mrs. Lindsay was not at home; at which announcement Captain Brooke tried hard not to look disgusted, and completely failed. He handed in his card, dismissed his carriage, and walked slowly down the drive with his hands behind his back, and the frown on his brow a trifle more pronounced than it had been before. But just as he was turning out at the gate a pattering of feet behind him caused him to glance over his shoulder, and presently he was overtaken by a breathless footman, who said :

“I beg your pardon, sir ; it is not Mrs. Lindsay’s day, but she will see you, if you will please to come back.”

Captain Brooke was very much pleased to turn back, and was not more successful in disguising his pleasure than he had been in concealing the contrary emotion a few minutes earlier. Persevering effort, however, is sure to be crowned with success in the long run, and by the time that he had been conducted across a cool, marble-flagged hall into a long drawing-room, darkened by sun-blinds, and furnished with a happy combination of luxury and good taste, he had managed to make himself look as dull and blank as he could possibly have desired.

The lady who rose to shake hands with him wore, on the contrary, an expression of pleased surprise. “How nice of you to find me out so soon, Arthur !” she said, in a low, musical voice. “When did you arrive ?”

Mrs. Lindsay was hardly what could be called a pretty woman ; but that did not prevent her from being very much and very generally admired. Her large brown eyes, which were at the same time soft and brilliant, and were shaded by long, curved lashes, constituted, perhaps, her only strict claim to beauty ; but she had a slight, graceful figure, her hands and

feet were remarkably well-shaped, and her taste in dress was perfect. With such advantages no woman can be considered plain, and in addition to them, Mrs. Lindsay possessed one of those faces which fascinate by their constant change of expression. It was a face rather lovable than beautiful, rather sensitive than intellectual; a face which grew upon you as you looked at it, and which was always pleasant to look upon. Captain Brooke appeared to find it so; for, instead of replying to the question put to him, he stood gazing silently at his questioner, until she lowered her eyes, while a faint tinge of color came into her cheeks.

“Won’t you sit down,” she said, “and tell me what you have been doing all this long time? How long is it since we met, Arthur?”

“Four years,” answered Captain Brooke, briefly.

She gave a little sigh. “It seems more, doesn’t it? That is, it does to me, because so many things have happened to me in these four years. And to you too, I suppose? One doesn’t live through four years without adventures of one kind or another. Please give me an account of them all.”

“I am sorry,” replied the young man, with a certain veiled bitterness of intonation, “that I can’t oblige you. I have had no adventures, and nothing

has happened to me but what you know of. I was ordered off to India just before your marriage, as you are aware, and, as you are also aware, I remained there until the other day, when I was sent to Suakin and hit by one of those fellows' slugs. Then I went home, invalided; and then the doctors despatched me to the South of France—why, I don't quite know. That's all."

"Did it hurt very much?" inquired Mrs. Lindsay, with a slight shudder. "The slug, I mean."

"Well, it did rather; at least, the getting it out did. But that is all over now, and it wasn't exactly to be called an adventure. Your experiences have been more exciting, perhaps."

Mrs. Lindsay looked a trifle hurt. "I do not think exciting is quite the word," she said.

"But what have they been? It would be a great deal more to the purpose if you were to tell me a little about what your life has been, and is; because you know pretty well the sort of uninteresting existence that I have led, and I know nothing of yours."

"I thought Mrs. Vane wrote you long letters, and kept you posted in all the doings of your friends at home."

"She has been kind enough to write to me some-

times, and it was she who told me that I should find you at Cannes; but I can't say that her letters are very long, or that they contain precisely the information that one would like to have. Perhaps that isn't her fault, though."

"I don't know what is the information that you would like to have about my life," said Mrs. Lindsay, smiling. "It is rather a useless one, I'm afraid. When I am in England, I spend my time between London and Shropshire, and I believe I shall spend the winters abroad in future, because I am by way of being delicate; though there is nothing really the matter with me, except a rather slow circulation. I bought this villa a few months ago. It is pretty, isn't it?"

"Very. I suppose you go into society a great deal, and see lots of people, and all that."

"I haven't begun to do so yet. In a few years, when Violet is old enough to come out, I shall have to begin, no doubt. You know that Violet has been living with me since Granny died?"

"Yes; that was one of the things that I heard from Mrs. Vane. And how is my old friend, Violet? Growing up as pretty as she promised to be?"

"I will call her," answered Mrs. Lindsay, "and then you will be able to answer for yourself."

She rose, and passed quickly through the adjoining conservatory into the garden, whence she returned in a few minutes, bringing with her a girl of fifteen, whose features bore a family resemblance to her own, though they were decidedly more regular, and who, even at that awkward age, had the erect carriage and ease of movement for which the Brookes have always been famed. This young lady held a fox-terrier under her arm. She walked straight up to the new-comer, extended her hand to him, and said:

“How do you do, Arthur? I am glad to hear that you haven’t forgotten me. Snap, this is your cousin Arthur; give him a paw.”

Snap at once did as he was told; whereat his mistress nodded approvingly. “He is full of intelligence,” she remarked; “he saw at a glance that you were all right.”

“I feel very much flattered,” said Captain Brooke, laughing.

“Well, you ought to be. It isn’t with everybody that Snap will make friends on a first introduction, I can tell you; and at any one whom he really distrusts, he always shows his teeth. Not rudely, you know, but just as a hint that he doesn’t mean to stand familiarity. He showed his teeth at Mr. Staunton.”

"And who is that unfortunate man?"

"Oh, a friend of Beatrice's. Snap and I don't think much of him, do we, Snap? Are you going to stay here long, Arthur? You look ever so much older, do you know?"

"So do you," returned Captain Brooke; "but I am afraid you are not yet of an age to mind being told that. You haven't outgrown your habit of engaging candor, I observe."

The girl's presence had the effect of setting both him and his hostess more at ease than they had been, and the conversation now took a somewhat livelier turn. In spite of Violet's criticism, Captain Brooke looked rather under than over his age, which was but six-and-twenty; although, as a matter of course, he no longer resembled the raw subaltern who had fallen so desperately in love with his cousin Beatrice four years previously, and had been so summarily sent to the right-about by old Mrs. Brooke, who stood *in loco parentis* to her orphaned grandchildren. Mrs. Brooke was, no doubt, a rather worldly old lady; but considerations of the commonest prudence would have justified her in refusing to hear of anything so insane as an engagement between Beatrice, whose dowry was only a scanty one, and a lad who had not more than five or six hundred a year of his own, including his pay.

When, therefore, Arthur sailed for India, he took with him the memory of a valedictory address, in which he had been cautioned against harboring the faintest hope or illusion with regard to his cousin; and, indeed, almost the first news that reached him from England was that of Beatrice's marriage to Mr. Lindsay, an invalid of more than double her age, whose temper was reported to be as irritable as his income was large. That, if true, must have meant a very bad temper indeed; for Mr. Lindsay's wealth was practically boundless. In any case, his wife did not have to put up with his temper long. At the end of two years he died, and, when his will was opened, it was discovered that he had made her his sole heiress.

It will be readily understood that, under such circumstances, Arthur felt some elements of embarrassment in the visit which ordinary politeness had compelled him to pay. Love is said to be blind, and it is quite possible that his feelings, which had remained unchanged during the period of his exile, may have led him to ignore or extenuate some of his fair cousin's defects; but he certainly could not credit her with much strength of mind. He knew that she had always been unselfish, sweet-tempered, easily influenced by the judg-

ment of others, and distrustful of her own; her marriage had saddened rather than angered him, and, had she not been so very rich, it is likely that he would have put himself in communication with her once more when she became free. Matters being as they were, he had felt it impossible for him to do this; but now, since by mere hazard he was at Cannes, it was quite equally impossible that he should abstain from calling upon her.

“Are you doing anything particular this evening?” she asked him, presently. “Would it bore you to come and dine quietly with us? We shall have nobody to meet you.”

“Except Mr. Staunton,” said Violet.

“Oh, yes; I forgot I had asked Mr. Staunton. Perhaps I may venture to put him forward as an extra inducement; for I am sure you will like him, though Violet and Snap don’t. He is very clever and very nice.”

Such a description is scarcely calculated to prepossess even the most unprejudiced person in favor of its subject, and it was not in the nature of things that Captain Brooke should be wholly unprejudiced.

“I shall be delighted to dine with you,” he answered; “but I don’t want any extra inducement,

whether it goes by the name of Staunton or not. Who is Mr. Staunton, if one may ask?"

"Well—he is Mr. Staunton."

"Quite so; and he is clever and he is nice. But what besides? Who is he when he is at home?"

"The Englishman's first question about every stranger," remarked Mrs. Lindsay, laughing. "What a thorough John Bull you are, Arthur! Mr. Staunton is perfectly respectable. He is a cousin of Lord Bellingham's, if it makes you any easier in your mind to know that, and he goes about a great deal here, and everybody likes him."

"With two notable exceptions, it appears."

"Violet is always conceiving strong likes and dislikes without any reason; when she is older she will know better. As for Snap, I suspect him of taking his cue from his mistress."

"Indeed he does no such thing!" cried Violet, indignantly. "There never lived a dog of more independent mind."

"Well," said Captain Brooke, getting up, "I shall endeavor to approach the study of Mr. Staunton's character with all Snap's impartiality, and I'll let you know my opinion of him when I have formed one. At least, I'll let you know if it is

favorable. If it isn't, I had better hold my tongue, perhaps."

"Perhaps so," agreed Mrs. Lindsay, with a smile; "I confess I don't like to hear my friends spoken against. But I am sure your opinion will be favorable."

If Mrs. Lindsay was really as sanguine upon that point as she professed to be, her knowledge of human nature must have been very defective; but it is more likely that she only meant to convey a timely note of warning to the young man. It was in that sense that he understood her remark; and so, although nothing was further from his intention than to make a second offer of marriage to his cousin, he became furiously jealous of Mr. Staunton before ever setting eyes upon him.

It may have been this, or it may have been the instinctive feeling of aversion, by means of which Nature so often puts us on our guard against a potential enemy, that caused him to greet that gentleman very stiffly when he was introduced to him a few hours later. Arthur Brooke was a straightforward and just young fellow, no respecter of persons, and always anxious to give the devil his due; but then he did not think that much was due to the devil. A very brief examination convinced

him that nothing more than distant civility was due to the stranger whom his cousin had assured him that he would like. "The man is a cad," was what he said to himself; and although he might, if cross-examined, have found it a little difficult to substantiate this accusation, he felt no inward doubt whatsoever as to its justice.

And yet Mr. Staunton was by no means unrefined either in looks or manners. He was a small, well-proportioned, and rather good-looking young man, who, at first sight, had the appearance of being so young as to be almost a boy, but who, on closer inspection in a strong light (Arthur noticed a decided preference on his part for standing with his back to the light), showed signs of having spent a certain number of years in the world—thirty, perhaps. He was perfectly smooth-shaven; his black hair and eyebrows contrasted somewhat oddly with a fresh complexion and a pair of restless, light-blue eyes; his teeth, which he displayed a good deal in talking, were white and even. For the rest, his evening-clothes were accurate in fit and cut, and he comported himself with the easy assurance of one accustomed to good society.

"I think you and I are staying in the same hotel," he remarked to Captain Brooke. "I saw your

name in the strangers' book to-day, and I wondered whether you could be any relation of Mrs. Lindsay's. You are in the 30th Hussars, aren't you?"

And then he mentioned the names of several officers in that regiment whom he said that he knew, and inquired how they were getting on. His amicable overtures meeting with no response, he soon—though without apparent annoyance—desisted from them, and devoted himself to his hostess, leaving it to be inferred that he was quite willing to be upon friendly terms with Captain Brooke, but did not greatly care whether he was so or not.

To Mrs. Lindsay, on the other hand, he took evident pains to make himself agreeable. Throughout dinner it was he who led the conversation, and in the course of it he amply justified her encomium upon him, so far as cleverness was concerned. As for his being nice, that could only depend upon the meaning that might be attached to that adjective. Arthur Brooke did not think him so, and thought him still less so afterwards in the drawing-room, when he drew Mrs. Lindsay away to the piano, entreating her to sing song after song, while he bent over her, and talked to her in subdued tones between times. Then he himself began to sing, in a sweet and true, if not very powerful, tenor voice;

and then, after a rather prolonged search, some duets were discovered and tried over.

Meanwhile Arthur, who was ignorant of music, sat apart, watching the couple, and saying to himself that Nice was probably a much more amusing place than Cannes. He would move on there, he determined, without loss of time. Presently Violet came and sat down beside him, nursing her dog.

"Isn't he a pig?" she whispered.

"Is it the custom for young ladies to make use of such expressions?" inquired Arthur, without, however, looking as much scandalized as he should have done. "I ask because I have been out of England for some years, and I may have dropped behind the times."

"It is *my* custom to call a pig a pig," replied Violet, serenely. "If you can help me to any worse name to call Mr. Staunton by I shall be much obliged to you. I suppose you see what he is after?"

Captain Brooke was very much inclined to fear that he did. Also, he was inclined to doubt whether it would be right to encourage the confidences of this too-precocious child. But, a desire to be informed of the worst overcoming his scruples, he answered, "I am not very quick at seeing things. What is he after?"

“Why, Beatrice, of course,” returned Violet, contemptuously. “Do you mean to say that you haven’t discovered that? He has been going on like this for the last month; and I am so thankful that you have come, because I know you will help me to drive him away. You will, won’t you?” she added, beseechingly.

Arthur did not reply immediately. After a minute he answered, in slow, measured accents, “I doubt whether either you or I have the power to do that, Violet; and I’m sure I don’t know what right we should have to prevent Beatrice from marrying whom she pleased, even if we had the power. Supposing that this fel—that Mr. Staunton is a suitable match for her in point of birth, and—”

“He isn’t a suitable match for her, and she doesn’t want to marry him,” interrupted Violet.

“Then I presume that she won’t marry him.”

“That’s all you know about her! Beatrice can’t refuse anything to anybody, and the more she dislikes giving what she is asked for the more positive she is that it is her duty to give it. I believe that if you begged for her head, and assured her that you really couldn’t get on without it, she would ring the bell for a chopper at once. You mustn’t let Mr. Staunton ask for what he wants.”

"But, my dear Violet, how am I to prevent him?"

"I don't know; but I know that I would prevent him if I were a man. Couldn't you begin by offering him money to go away?"

"I am afraid I could hardly offer him enough," replied Captain Brooke, smiling at the simplicity of the suggestion.

"Well, then, you might find out something disgraceful that he has done, and threaten to expose him. I am sure, by the look of him, he must have done lots of disgraceful things."

"Possibly; but I don't quite see my way to finding them out. Where did you first meet him?"

"Oh, here; soon after our arrival. I forget who introduced him to Beatrice, but he began to make up to her the very first day. I knew he would the moment that I saw him. They always do."

"Who always do?"

"Oh, all sorts of horrid people. Beatrice says she would much rather be poor than rich, and so would I; though it would be all right if only she would make up her mind never to marry again, or else marry somebody really nice, and have done with it. Arthur, I wish *you* would marry her."

Captain Brooke was spared the necessity of making any reply to this rather embarrassing speech by

the approach of Mrs. Lindsay, who perhaps thought that she had neglected her cousin too long; and soon afterwards the little party broke up. It was inevitable that the two men should walk down to their hotel together, and Mr. Staunton beguiled the way by discoursing very agreeably and intelligently about the late Egyptian campaign. But he obtained little beyond an occasional grunt of assent or dissent from his companion, who parted from him at last with a curt "Good-night," declining the offer of a cigar and a brandy-and-soda in Mr. Staunton's sitting-room.

CHAPTER II.

THE best and surest method of earning popularity is to love your neighbor as yourself. Some few people there are in the world who really do seem to carry out this precept, if not quite literally, yet as approximately as poor human nature will permit; and these are universally and deservedly beloved in return. But it is possible, as everybody knows, to be popular upon other and easier terms. The man who can be all things to all men, who knows how to flatter delicately, and who, if he is bored, is careful never to show that he is so, may count with certainty upon being both liked and sought after. It is, no doubt, probable enough that he will be suspected of being more or less of a humbug (for, however much flattery we may manage to digest on our own score, it vexes us to see the same dose administered to and complacently swallowed by our fellows); but that humbugs are often very pleasant people is not to be denied, and the society of Cannes had unanimously pronounced Mr. Staunton to be a pleasant person.

Arthur Brooke, who met him pretty constantly during the next few days, both at the Villa des Châtagniers and elsewhere, and watched him narrowly, was fain to admit that his manners were agreeable, and his dexterity in suiting himself to his company worthy of a skilled diplomatist. He could talk about music to Mrs. Lindsay; he could discuss racing with the venerable Lord Marden, who had been upon the turf throughout his long life, and would infallibly have detected any superficial pretension to knowledge of that deep subject; and his remarks upon the land question to the Right Honorable Solomon Cockshott were so shrewd and so epigrammatic that that rising Radical statesman was moved to remonstrate with him upon leading a mere butterfly existence, instead of utilizing his great talents as a representative of the people.

“I do like Mr. Staunton!” cried a lady, enthusiastically, one day to Arthur; “he has so many sides.”

“And all of them outsides,” Arthur remarked.

“Oh, of course. I suppose he possesses an inside, like the rest of us; but I really don’t feel the slightest curiosity to look at it. His having such a number of outsides is what constitutes his superiority to other people, who usually have only one.”

From a social point of view, that might be reasonable enough; but when the many-sided man is likely to marry your cousin, and when that cousin happens also to be the woman with whom you are yourself profoundly and hopelessly in love, legitimate curiosity may be pushed to somewhat greater lengths. This was what Arthur felt; and a sad disappointment it was to him to be baffled in all his attempts to obtain some information as to Mr. Staunton's history. Nobody seemed to know, or want to know, much about him. "Oh, he is one of the Bellingham Stauntons, you know," they said; as if that rendered all further investigation superfluous. A reference to the peerage showed these Bellingham Stauntons to be a numerous clan, but threw no light upon the identity of this particular member of it; nor could he very well be asked in so many words to give an account of himself, although he displayed no reluctance to respond to Captain Brooke's discreet hints.

"I am a rolling stone," he confessed candidly one day; "I have never been able to bring myself to settle down anywhere yet; but I shall have to come to it sooner or later, I suppose. In the meantime it suits me very well to knock about the world, and I have seen all four quarters of it. I am not sure

that that isn't better than having dawdled one's life away in the Guards."

"Were you ever in the Guards?" asked Brooke, quickly.

"No. I thought of the army at one time; only I felt that I couldn't stand the monotony of it. You have had the luck to see some service; but one can never count upon that."

There really was nothing to be said against the man. Captain Brooke, therefore, wisely held his peace, and when his cousin asked him what he thought of her friend, only replied, "I think you gave an excellent description of him; he is just what you told me that he was."

"That means that you have been trying to pick holes in him, and that you can't," returned Mrs. Lindsay, a little defiantly.

The young man smiled, and changed the subject. He did not choose to be drawn into a discussion out of which he was sure to come second best; nor was he concerned to dispute his cousin's right to marry whom she pleased. He had quite made up his mind that he could not, consistently with self-respect, ask her to be his wife; consequently, if her wish was to marry again, it was assuredly not he who could stand in the way of her gratifying that wish. Nev-

ertheless, he decided that he would not go on to Nice just yet. Relationship ought to count for something, and he felt that it was his privilege, if not precisely his duty, to see that poor Beatrice did not fall a prey to some needy fortune-hunter. So he remained at Cannes, watching the development of events, without making any effort to control the same, and turning a deaf ear to the remonstrances of Violet, who plainly professed herself much disappointed in him.

If Mrs. Lindsay had been equally open with her cousin, it is probable that she would have had to make a somewhat similar declaration. In the days of her girlhood Arthur had realized her ideal of all that a man should be; she had not disguised from him that, if she had been free to consult her own inclinations, she would have married him, and braved the ills of poverty; and his dismissal had cost her many an hour of secret weeping. Afterwards, when Mr. Lindsay had made his offer, she had yielded to the pressure brought to bear upon her by her relations, feeling that, since she could not be Arthur's wife, it mattered little whose wife she might become. She had endeavored to do her duty to a peevish and uncongenial husband; but she had been as unable to feel any affection for him during his lifetime as to restrain her thoughts from reverting to her early

love upon his death. She was, however, no less convinced than Arthur that what might once have been could not now be. She had chosen her lot in life; she had preferred wealth to love; and, although the choice had not really been her own, she felt that she was bound to accept the consequences of it. The notion of marrying Arthur upon Mr. Lindsay's money was, not unnaturally, repugnant to her; and, therefore, she had been a good deal perturbed by the news of his proposed visit to Cannes. She had fully considered, before his arrival, what her line of conduct with regard to him ought to be. She had determined that she would be very kind, but very firm, and that she would give him to understand that, anxious though she was to be his friend, she could by no possibility become anything more.

There are few things more provoking than to arm yourself to the teeth for a desperate resistance, and then to find that nobody is dreaming of attacking you. When Arthur presented himself at the Villa des Châtaigniers day after day, and displayed no more than a cousinly interest in her proceedings, Mrs. Lindsay could not help being a little angry with him. She did not, of course, regret his indifference, or wish him to be in love with her, seeing that such a love must have been condemned before-

hand to be rejected; but she thought herself entitled to be surprised at the facility with which he had got over what he had once declared to be an attachment which would end only with his life. She well remembered the letter that she had received from him before his departure for India, the passionate phrases that he had employed, and the pity that she had felt for him. His remarkable fickleness was, doubtless, a fortunate feature in his character for himself; but it was scarcely one which redounded to his credit. In this way it came about that Mrs. Lindsay was often apt to be a little sharp and sarcastic in her speeches to a man who desired nothing more ardently than her welfare, and it may even be that her marked encouragement of Mr. Staunton's attentions was partly due to the same cause.

Mr. Staunton's attentions had not, however, as yet entered upon what could be accounted a serious phase, and were more conspicuous to outsiders than to the subject of them. Mrs. Lindsay was, of course, aware that he liked her very much, perhaps also that he admired her; but his demeanor was rather that of an intimate friend than of a lover, and in the course of his visits, which were paid almost daily, he said little or nothing to her that might not have been said in the ears of the entire English

colony. But outsiders, who knew only that the visits were paid, naturally drew their own conclusions from that fact; and Arthur Brooke found himself to all intents and purposes in the position of an outsider. He often found himself, too, in the position of a third person, which was both painful and embarrassing. Half-ashamed of mounting guard, yet more than half afraid to quit his post, he spent many long hours in Mrs. Lindsay's drawing-room, scarcely opening his lips, and pretending to read the English papers, round the corner of which she might have seen him peeping at frequent intervals, if she had chosen to turn her eyes in his direction.

One afternoon, when he had the good or ill fortune to find his cousin alone, he took heart of grace, and said:

"It seems to me that people are much less particular about making acquaintances than they used to be. I wonder what our poor old grandmother would have thought of the society of this place, for instance."

"Is it not as select as it ought to be?" asked Mrs. Lindsay. "I see very little of it myself; but from what Mr. Staunton tells me I should think it was very amusing, and Granny always liked to be amused."

"She took very good care to find out who people were before she let them into her house, though."

"And is it customary to omit that precaution at Cannes?"

"So it would appear. Staunton himself is an example of it. He is made welcome wherever he goes, and yet I haven't encountered a single person who ever saw or heard of him before this winter."

"Oh, you have been making inquiries, then?"

"I don't mind confessing that I have; and I only wish they had not been such a complete failure. I don't for a moment assert that he isn't what he professes to be; still, it would be more satisfactory if he could produce some sort of credentials, and I must say I am surprised that nobody has thought of asking for them."

"Meaning me?"

"Would you be very much affronted if I said yes? After all, I am your nearest male relative now, and I do think that, in your situation, it behooves you to be rather particularly circumspect."

"I was not conscious of having been the reverse."

"Do you consider it altogether circumspect to have Staunton in your house so continually? Surely you must be aware that it is remarked upon. I happen to know for a fact that half the old women

in the place are gossiping about it; and though you may not mind that, I do."

These words, which were uttered with some slight display of temper, were not wholly displeasing to Mrs. Lindsay, who said, gently,

"But, Arthur, you are continually in the house, too. What is it that you wish me to do? Am I to shut my doors against Mr. Staunton?"

"Of course not," he returned. "I should have no right in the world to make such a demand, or to interfere with you in your choice of—of your friends. All I meant to suggest was that you should try to discover a little more about Staunton. As for me, everybody knows that I am your cousin, and my visits are not likely to cause gossip of any kind."

Having risked something like an impertinence and received a soft answer, Captain Brooke was a good deal taken aback when what he had intended for a conciliatory speech was rewarded by a prompt snub.

"I should have supposed," Mrs. Lindsay said, "that there were limits to the privileges even of a cousin. At any rate, I agree with you that you have no right to dictate to me who my friends shall be; and as for prying into their antecedents, that would be an insult not only to them, but to my own

judgment. I should not make a friend of any one who was not fit to be my friend."

This rather audacious claim to infallibility passed unrebuked; for, before any rejoinder could be made to it, Mr. Staunton himself was announced, and Arthur immediately withdrew, leaving his rival—if such he could be called—in possession of the field for once.

He walked away, calling himself a stupid idiot and other opprobrious names at every step; and, indeed, it must be owned that he had shown very little of the wisdom of the serpent in the colloquy just recorded. When he reached his hotel he sat down and dashed off a letter to a very old friend of his, whose sagacity had been of comfort to him in more than one previous season of perplexity.

"MY DEAR MRS. VANE," he wrote, "I wish you would make haste and come here. You said you would certainly be at Cannes before the end of February, and though we are now in March, there is no sign of you; nor do the people at your villa know anything about the date of your arrival, for I have been up there to inquire three times. You don't need me to say that I shall rejoice to see you for your own sake; but I have another reason for en-

treating you to hurry your movements, and that is, that I am very uneasy about Beatrice. She has taken up a fellow called Staunton, who may or may not be a fortune-hunting adventurer, and my remonstrances have no sort of effect upon her. I can't remonstrate very forcibly, nor, indeed, say much to her at all upon such a subject. You will easily understand why. If this man is honest and well-born there is no reason why she should not marry him; for I think she is sure to marry again some day. But, between ourselves, I have my doubts about him. He says he is a cousin of Lord Bellingham's, whom you, who know everybody, are pretty certain to know. So, will you try and find out whether it is all right? And, whether it is or not, will you come out here and inspect the man yourself? By doing so you may save Beatrice from committing a fatal mistake, and you will confer one more kindness upon

“Your most sincere friend,

“ARTHUR BROOKE.”

Before a week was over this appeal was responded to as follows:

“Curzon Street, 9th March, 18—.

“MY DEAR ARTHUR,—If I did not fly from the east winds a month ago it was not the will that was

wanting on my part. A series of accidents have kept me at home; but now I am packing up my portmanteau, and you may expect to see me in a few days. Unfortunately, I am not acquainted with Lord Bellingham; but I have ascertained that he has eighteen authentic male first cousins. When I tell you that I have traced the whole dozen and a half of them, you will admit that I have carried out your instructions with energy and despatch. No less than thirteen of the number are under twenty years of age; and, of the remaining five, one is in the navy, one is in the Life Guards, one is a parson, and two are at Oxford. This seems to dispose of your friend; but don't say anything about it to Beatrice, because I can't swear that he isn't a second cousin, and we had better not put ourselves in the wrong. Why you cannot speak to her upon the subject of marriage I am at a loss to understand; I should have thought that you could. But never mind. I am coming, like a good fairy, to set everything straight, and I don't mean Beatrice to marry Mr. Staunton, even if he is a Staunton of that ilk.

“Yours very sincerely,

“LAURA VANE.”

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Arthur Brooke laid down Mrs. Vane's letter he rubbed his hands and began to take a more cheerful view of existence. Of his correspondent's diplomatic ability and value as an ally he had the highest opinion. She was a woman of something over middle age, who had lived much in the world, possessed a strong will, as well as a certain insight into character, and enjoyed nothing more than arranging the destinies of her friends for them after a benevolently despotic fashion. Distantly connected with Arthur and Mrs. Lindsay by blood, she had always been closely connected with both of them by the ties of intimacy and friendship, and, although she had been unable to approve of an engagement between them in days gone by, her sympathies had been strongly with the young man after his dismissal. Not only were her sympathies with him still, but she had given him pretty clearly to understand that a renewal of his offer to Beatrice would have her warm support. The feelings of pride and delicacy

which had precluded him from making such an offer appeared to her creditable, but somewhat overstrained, and she attached little more importance to them than is understood to be attached to the formal *nolo episcopari*, which is uttered only to be overruled.

At the bottom of his heart, Arthur was conscious that his scruples were not absolutely invincible, and this knowledge may have counted for something in his satisfaction at the news of Mrs. Vane's approach. Not less satisfactory to him was the conclusion which he somewhat prematurely deduced from her letter, that Staunton was sailing under false colors. He might, at a pinch, have been magnanimous enough to view with resignation the marriage of the woman whom he loved to a man worthy of her; but his magnanimity would have been abnormal if he could have witnessed the discomfiture of this particular man without a little of that emotion which the Germans call *Schadenfreude*, and which, for having no exact equivalent in other languages, is not the less familiar to all human hearts.

Pending the issue which he anticipated, and which he knew that Mrs. Vane might be trusted to bring about in a dexterous and telling style, he assumed an attitude of dignified neutrality, visited

the Villa des Châtaigniers less frequently, and was distantly polite to Staunton, whom he could not help seeing every day, and who always greeted him amiably. There is, however, a difference between showing civility to an undeclared foe, and consenting to eat his salt; and when Captain Brooke was requested to join in an excursion to Grasse, followed by a dinner at Mr. Staunton's expense, he judged it best to excuse himself. His excuse—a not very intelligible one—was received with a few perfunctory words of regret by his would-be entertainer, and there, no doubt, the matter would have ended, if the two men had been alone. But it chanced that Mr. Staunton had given his invitation in the street, where Arthur had met him in company with Mrs. Lindsay and her sister; and Mrs. Lindsay said, "Oh, Arthur, you *must* come! I know you can, if you choose;" while Violet, from the background, frowned and nodded at him so emphatically that he wavered, and at last confessed that he might be able to manage it.

The quaint old town of Grasse, perched high among the hills that shelter Cannes, and itself sheltered by the more lofty ranges which rise behind it, is in these days known by name to most English people, and by sight to a great many. Its steep,

narrow streets, into which the noonday sun can scarcely force a passage, and which have remained precisely what they were a century ago or more, are frequented during the winter season by persons whose dress and appearance has a startling effect of incongruity amid those crumbling walls. Turning one of the sharp corners suddenly, you may find yourself face to face with the Duchess of Doublechin, attended by a bevy of Belgravian youths and maidens, or haply you may run against 'Arry and 'Arriet, toiling along arm-in-arm and mopping their brows; for it is a lamentable fact that Cannes, whence these sight-seers hail, is no longer the exclusively aristocratic resort that it once was. However, lest the reader should fear that he is going to be taken into low company, let us hasten to add that the party which had been got together by Mr. Staunton was composed of ladies and gentlemen whose social standing was quite unimpeachable, and who were, perhaps, on that account all the more willing to take the social standing of their entertainer upon trust.

He had carriages waiting at the station to convey them up the hill. When they had passed through the gates of the town, he took them to see what there was to be seen—the cathedral, the old streets,

the manufactories of scent and bonbons and candied fruits, for which the place is famed, and of which he purchased samples for presentation to the ladies. Mrs. Lindsay received an exquisite enamel *bonbonnière* (evidently not a product of Grasse) filled with sugared orange-blossoms, and there was a good deal of jocularity and laughter over this gift, which to one of the party seemed to be in execrable taste.

When they had eaten enough bonbons and had had more than a sufficiency of scent poured upon their handkerchiefs, they all adjourned to the terrace to admire the view and the sunset, and then it was that Violet took occasion to draw near to Arthur, who was standing moodily apart.

"Are you enjoying yourself?" she inquired.

"No," he answered, rather crossly, "I am not."

"Shake hands, then; for I'm not enjoying myself either. Do you think Beatrice is?"

"To all appearance, she is."

"And you always judge by appearances, don't you? Do you know, Arthur, that you are very stupid? I like you all the better for it, because I hate clever men; but there is such a thing as being *too* stupid. Why don't you go and talk to Beatrice a little? You never talk to her now; you sit in

corners, looking bored to death, and let that odious wretch have everything his own way. Oh, here he comes! Thank goodness, Beatrice is out of hearing, and I can be as rude to him as I please, without being scolded for it afterwards."

Mr. Staunton advanced, with a smile upon his face, and did not seem to fear a rude reception; though experience might have warned him that he would assuredly not meet with anything else at the hands of Mrs. Lindsay's sister.

"Miss Violet," said he, "I hope you will honor me by accepting this small memento of Grasse." And he produced a cut-glass scent-bottle with a gold stopper.

"Thanks," replied Violet, curtly; "but I abhor all scents. They make me sick."

"Really? How unfortunate! But at any rate bonbons are not likely to produce that disagreeable effect upon you at your time of life, and I think I have a *bonbonnière* here which you may not disdain."

"It's quite like a school-feast, isn't it?" said Violet, turning to Arthur, with a laugh. "Plenty to eat all round, and a present for everybody to take away. But I won't rob you of your *bonbonnière*, Mr. Staunton. Bonbons may be be suitable to my

age; but enamel boxes aren't. You had better keep it for somebody who is a few years older."

"It seems to me," said Staunton, quite good-humoredly, "that you are rather advanced for your age."

"Now that you mention it, perhaps I am. I don't think I am so easily taken in as some of my elders."

Staunton looked surprised, and a little amused. "That sounds very pointed," he remarked. "I hope you don't mean to accuse me of trying to take you in."

"I don't know whether you have tried or not," returned Violet, nodding at him; "but you haven't succeeded."

Even Arthur felt that this was pushing incivility too far. "My dear Violet!" he remonstrated.

But Staunton only laughed, and glanced at his watch. "Are you ready for dinner, Brooke?" he asked. "Because I think dinner must be ready for us by this time. Shall we go into the hotel and see?"

It was not upon such culinary skill as might be obtainable at Grasse that Mr. Staunton had chosen to rely for the comfort of his guests. He had taken care to despatch a *chef* and a competent staff of waiters from Cannes in advance; and the dinner

which was presently served was as unexceptionable as the wines that accompanied it. A man who gives you a good dinner and good wine cannot but appear to be a good fellow while the dinner lasts. On the following morning you may be able to revise your estimate of him, and make reasonable deductions from it ; but for the time being, gratitude is apt to interfere with impartial criticism. Yet to this, as to all rules, there are exceptions, and Captain Brooke, who ate little and drank less, was not hampered in his judgment by any feeling of thankfulness to his host.

What he was thinking, while he lent an inattentive ear to the remarks of the lady who sat beside him, was : “ This must have cost a lot of money. I wonder whether the fellow has got any money ; I wonder whether he doesn’t mean to pay for our entertainment with Beatrice’s money. Confound him ! it is like his cheek to put her on his right hand, when there are four women of higher rank present. It’s very marked—no doubt he intends it to be marked. What did that child mean by telling me to talk more to her sister ? Is it possible ?—but no ; of course it isn’t ! There can’t be the slightest doubt that Beatrice likes being made conspicuous in this way. If she doesn’t like it, why should she submit to it ? ”

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Lindsay did not altogether like it ; and if Arthur had been a little more just and a little less hasty, he would have acknowledged that she was at least not to blame for occupying the place of honor. In such matters a guest has no choice but to accept the host's decision, and Mrs. Lindsay, though somewhat annoyed at having a false position thrust upon her, could only trust that at so informal a gathering it might be suffered to pass without remark. That it had been remarked by Arthur she could not help being aware. His displeasure was so evident that she forgave him for the indifference which he had displayed on a former occasion, as well as for his avoidance of her during the past ten days, and as soon as dinner was over she took an opportunity of approaching him, with a view to the renewal of friendly relations.

"Are you still angry with me, Arthur?" she asked.

Such a question, when spoken softly in the twilight, and accompanied by an appealing glance from a pair of very expressive eyes, is extremely trying to the nerves of a man bent upon doing his duty, come what may. Arthur found it so ; but he resolutely swallowed down the impetuous reply which rose to his lips, and said : "Still angry with you ?

I have not been angry with you at all, Beatrice, that I am aware of."

"I thought," she said, "that you did not like the way in which I took your advice the other day. At all events, you have scarcely been to see me since, and when we do meet, you won't speak."

"When I speak, I am apt to give offence," remarked Captain Brooke. "If you want me to say what a delightful day we have had, and how lovely the effect of the moonlight is on the hills over there, and all that sort of thing, I will endeavor to entertain you. Only I fancy Mr. Staunton would do it better."

"I have no doubt that he would; but I don't want to be talked to in that way just now. Say exactly what you think, Arthur; only don't let us quarrel."

"Is there not some danger of our quarrelling if I say what I think? You know already what I think about your intimacy with Mr. Staunton; so you can easily guess what I think about the exhibition to which we have been treated this evening."

"Exhibition!" repeated Mrs. Lindsay, indignantly.

"Really, I can't find any other word. If you are engaged to be married to the man, there is no more

to be said, and, perhaps, this way of making your engagement known to your friends is as good a one as another—”

“You know I am not engaged to him!” she interrupted.

“I did not know it. I can’t see what, short of that, could excuse—explain, I mean—your publicly accepting a valuable present from him.”

The tears rose into Mrs. Lindsay’s eyes; but anger dried them before they fell. “Thank you, Arthur,” she said, calmly; “you have given me your opinion of me now, and we won’t quarrel over it. But I shall beware of asking you your thoughts a second time; they are too unpleasant and too unfriendly to be talked about.” And with that she turned away.

To see one’s opportunity and to seize it might be called the secret of success, were not the word secret something of a misnomer as applied to an axiom which all the world admits. It is not the conditions of success that are generally ignored; but the many fail, while the few succeed, because the many either do not perceive the right moment for action, or, perceiving it, lack the courage to profit by it. The men who have both insight and audacity are the men who win; and Mr. Staunton was one of those

enviable persons. Standing in a corner of the long and almost dark room, from which the rest of his guests had sauntered out by twos and threes, he had watched the colloquy between Mrs. Lindsay and her cousin, had noted its abrupt termination, and knew just as well what they had been talking about as if every word of their conversation had reached his ears. Without hesitating for a moment, he followed Mrs. Lindsay down-stairs and caught her up in the doorway, where she paused to look out at the moonlight, which was now flooding the old town and the mountains opposite, and the plain far beneath.

"We have still a good half-hour before the train starts," he remarked. "Shall we see if we can find the others? They have gone to the terrace, I think."

She made a sign of assent, and he walked beside her for a few yards in silence. The sound of voices and laughter, proceeding from a short distance off, gave a clew to the whereabouts of the remainder of the party; but it seemed that Mr. Staunton was not, after all, very anxious to join them; for on reaching a stone bench he said, with some suddenness:

"Please sit down here, Mrs. Lindsay, if you are not afraid of catching cold. I have something to say to you."

She paused irresolutely for a few seconds, but

finally decided to do as she was asked; and Staunton continued:

“I am sure you must know what it is that I wish to say to you, and you may, perhaps, think that I am too presumptuous in venturing to tell you that I love you. In one way, no doubt, it is presumptuous; but not as most people count presumption. It would be neither more nor less so if you were a beggar. In the eyes of the world, your large fortune places you far above me; but I cannot admit that that is really the case. Money is power; but the possession of power is worthless unless you know how to use it. It is because I believe that I do know how to use power that I consider myself upon a footing of equality with you as regards that matter. If I were proposing a bargain to you, I might say, ‘Give me control over this force, and I will show you what can be done with it. Alone, neither of us could accomplish anything great; but together we can not only make ourselves heard of in the world, but leave the world a little better than we found it.’ Of course, though, I am not proposing a bargain to you. I ask you to marry me because I love you; I only speak like this by way of explaining why I think I have the right to say boldly that I love you.”

“I quite admit your right, Mr. Staunton,” an-

swered Mrs. Lindsay, who had not been at all prepared for an harangue of this kind; "but—"

"I was sure beforehand that you would admit it," he interrupted. "Others, however, will not. You will find that objections will be made to me. It will be said that I am not a rich enough man to be above suspicion, and that, if I marry you, it will be for the sake of your money. Well, as to that I must ask you to trust me; there is no means of disproving such assertions. For some opposition we must be prepared; it will be our own fault if we allow it to trouble us."

"But, Mr. Staunton, you are really going a great deal too fast," protested Mrs. Lindsay. "You seem to take it for granted that I am willing to accept your offer."

"Ah," he returned, with a swift change of tone, "if I seem to assume that, it is because I can't bear to admit to myself how much I doubt it. I haven't the vanity to think that you love me; but without any vanity I may say that I believe I can make you happy. Our tastes are the same, and so, I fancy, are our ambitions and our views of life. I feel sure that I understand you better than most men would. But just because I do understand you, and because I see how amiable and unselfish you are, I know that you

are very easily influenced. You are very much under the influence of your cousin, Captain Brooke, for instance, and, unfortunately for me, Captain Brooke does not like me. I am sorry for it, because I have always rather liked him; but for some reason or other I am in his black books, and it is certain that he will not allow you to marry me, if he can help it."

"I should not consult him," Mrs. Lindsay replied, drawing herself up slightly. "Neither he nor any one else can prevent me from doing what I wish; only I do not wish to marry again. I am very sorry if this is a disappointment to you, Mr. Staunton; but I have quite made up my mind about it."

Mr. Staunton, however, had also made up his mind, which was of far greater strength than Mrs. Lindsay's. How much stronger it was may be estimated by the fact that, within ten minutes of making the above declaration, she had consented to intrust her future life, her happiness, and her fortune to a man of whom she knew little more than that he had a persuasive tongue, a tolerable tenor voice, and agreeable manners. Also that her cousin Arthur was unreasonably prejudiced against him.

CHAPTER IV.

IN moments of irritation we are all prone to say more than we mean, and Captain Brooke, in giving his cousin to understand that by accepting an enamel box from Mr. Staunton she had as good as announced her engagement to that gentleman, had certainly been guilty of some conscious exaggeration. In truth, he believed the catastrophe referred to to be a remote, although a possible one; so that when, on the ensuing morning, a note was brought to him from the Villa des Châtaigniers, he was very far from being prepared for its contents. Had Mrs. Lindsay been able to see the look of blank consternation which overspread his features as he perused her composition, she would doubtless have felt amply repaid for the pains which she had taken with it.

“I know you do not like Mr. Staunton,” she wrote, in conclusion; “but I am sure you will not distress me by refusing to be friendly with him now; and when you are better acquainted with him, you will

admit, I hope, that my choice has been a wise one. He is coming to tea with me at five o'clock this afternoon, when I shall be very glad to see you also, if you have nothing better to do."

After Captain Brooke had reassembled his scattered wits, it occurred to him that he could easily find something better to do than that. A letter from his friend Mrs. Vane had apprised him of her intended arrival at half-past three that afternoon, and although, under ordinary circumstances, he would have felt bound to allow her twenty-four hours of rest after her journey, the present circumstances seemed to be extraordinary enough to justify a less considerate course. He resolved, therefore, that he would betake himself to her house, instead of to Mrs. Lindsay's, at tea-time, and during the interval he employed himself in writing various replies—some sarcastic, some reproachful, some formally polite—to his cousin, and tearing them all up impartially, when written.

Mrs. Vane, a bright-eyed little woman, whose hair was turning gray, but whose cheeks still retained something of the bloom of youth, cut short the apologies with which her visitor announced himself.

"I am never tired," said she, "and I always make

it a rule to send the servants on three days ahead of me, so that everything may be in its place when I arrive. I am quite ready to receive you, and very glad that you have come. Now, what is your news?"

"Bad," answered the young man, gloomily; "worse by a great deal than anything that I expected to have to tell you. Beatrice sent me a note this morning, announcing that she had engaged herself to Staunton."

"My dear Arthur," exclaimed Mrs. Vane, "how amazingly stupid you must have been! What can you have been thinking about to let things come to such a pass!"

"I dare say I am very stupid," agreed Arthur, humbly; "but I really don't see how I was to prevent this from happening. I said everything to Beatrice that I could say."

"Everything except the right thing, I suppose. Well, there is not much to be gained by discussing what you said or left unsaid now. We must get her to break off the engagement as soon as possible, that's all."

Arthur shook his head dubiously. "I am afraid that even you may find it difficult to manage that," he replied.

"I feel perfectly confident of being able to man-

age it. Whether it will take days or weeks will depend chiefly upon what kind of man Mr. Staunton may be."

"I should say that he was a determined kind of man."

"Ah—and a gentleman?"

"Well, no, I don't think so; but he seems to go down with most people. Violet and I agree in suspecting that there is a screw loose about him somewhere."

"You haven't made the mistake of being rude to him since the engagement was given out, I hope."

"I haven't had the chance. As I tell you, I only heard the news from Beatrice this morning, when she wrote, and asked me to go to tea with her at five o'clock and meet the fellow. Of course, I didn't care about doing that. I haven't even answered her note yet."

"Ring the bell," said Mrs. Vane. "I shall order the carriage and take you there at once. When I have had a look at Mr. Staunton I shall be better able to judge what can be done; but one thing is certain—you must not quarrel with either of them. So prepare to dissemble. It will not be necessary for you to say much or to look pleased; only you should endeavor to look resigned."

"What energy you have!" exclaimed Arthur. "I will do my best to obey your orders; but really I am very much ashamed of setting you to work like this the moment that you arrive."

"To confess the truth, I rather like it," answered Mrs. Vane, laughing. "I am like the terrier who was always ready to draw a badger, it's 'a little 'oliday' for me. Besides, Beatrice will naturally expect me to lose no time in congratulating her."

A quarter of an hour later the allied forces arrived upon the scene of operations, where Mrs. Lindsay and Mr. Staunton were discovered, with the tea-table between them; and the former, though displaying some slight embarrassment, was evidently pleased by the promptitude with which her old friend had sought her out. To Arthur, who almost choked himself in getting out an incoherent speech about thanking her for her note, and hoping that she would be happy, she said very little; indeed, Mrs. Vane, who at once took her affectionately by the hand and drew her away into a corner, gave her no chance of addressing more than a word or two to him. The two ladies saw fit to carry on their conversation in very low tones; and thus Arthur found himself compelled to sit down beside Staunton, who said:

“Beatrice tells me that she has let you into our secret. We don’t want it to be generally talked about just yet; but she feels that you are not quite like a stranger.”

If anything could have infuriated poor Arthur more than to hear this man speak of his cousin by her Christian name, it would have been the patronizing assurance that she did not regard him quite as a stranger, coming from one who had himself been a complete stranger to her only a few weeks before. But he bore his instructions in mind, and kept strictly within the letter of them. He did not say much, nor did he look pleased; but his countenance expressed as near an approach to resignation as could be expected, and he was even able to allow Staunton some credit for tact in immediately changing the subject.

If Mr. Staunton possessed the gift of tact, Mrs. Vane was not far behind him in that respect, while she was perhaps his superior in the art of tactics. All the time that she was talking to Mrs. Lindsay in an impressive whisper she kept an eye on him; she detected one or two furtive glances which he shot in her direction, and she perceived that he already regarded her as a probable antagonist. It was necessary to correct that impression, and so she rose pres-

ently, saying, "Now, Beatrice, you must show me your garden. I want to see what improvements you have made since you came into possession."

Once out of doors, there was no difficulty in taking Mr. Staunton aside; and this opportunity she turned to account in a manner worthy of her high reputation. She guessed that he was not a man who could be easily humbugged, and that soft phrases would be far more likely to set him upon his guard than to conciliate him. Therefore she began, without any preface:

"Confess, Mr. Staunton, that for the last half-hour you have been wishing me at Jericho. You have been saying to yourself, 'It is rather hard that, just when I have obtained the object of my fondest hopes, a troublesome, meddling old woman should drop down from the skies, and want to know all about me, and very probably raise all sorts of objections to me.'"

"I am not conscious of the feelings that you describe, Mrs. Vane," answered Mr. Staunton, smiling. "I trust that I shall not be found objectionable by you; but even though such should be my misfortune, I should still venture to hope that Mrs. Lindsay's opinion of me would not be altered by the disapproval of any friend, however valued."

“Don’t be too sure of that. Mrs. Lindsay (to whom you are not yet married), is much guided by her friends, and by none more than my humble self. Luckily for you, I am really not hard to please. I don’t consider it at all indispensable for her to make what is called a great match. The main thing is that her husband should be firm, kind-hearted, and no fool. I don’t say that he should be a gentleman, because that is understood, and because I don’t doubt your possessing that qualification. They tell me that you are nearly related to Lord Bellingham, whom I don’t happen to know personally, but whose position is, of course, a sufficient guarantee. Now, is it worth your while, do you think, to cultivate my acquaintance, or do my blunt manners repel you?”

“I am never repelled by straightforward language, Mrs. Vane,” replied Mr. Staunton, blandly, “and it will give me very great pleasure to become better acquainted with you.”

“Then come and dine quietly with me at eight o’clock to-morrow evening. I shall ask one or two other people; but, for obvious reasons, I sha’n’t ask Beatrice.”

She gave him a little nod, by way of farewell, and, catching up Captain Brooke, who was standing

beside Mrs. Lindsay, but was not speaking to her, said, briskly, "I will give you a lift down as far as your hotel, if you like. Good-night, Beatrice; mind you come and see me soon."

"Well?" asked Arthur, eagerly, as soon as he was seated in Mrs. Vane's carriage; "what do you think of him?"

"I hope to be able to tell you shortly before midnight to-morrow," she replied. "He is coming to dine with me, and so must you, if you have no other engagement. I rather fancy that he will find me one too many for him."

Mrs. Vane, who was an old winter-resident at Cannes, had a large circle of friends among those who frequented the place, and was justly renowned for the little dinners which she gave on most nights of the week, and which were generally arranged by her at very short notice. When Staunton, in obedience to the invitation that he had received, presented himself in her drawing-room, he found nine people, of whom Captain Brooke was one, assembled there. They were persons with whom he had recently made acquaintance, and he could not but notice the look of interest and curiosity with which they, one and all, greeted him. It was plain that the news of his engagement had leaked out through

one of those mysterious channels which no amount of care can ever effectually close in such cases; and it was no less plain that the company was inclined to regard him with altered and more critical eyes in consequence. For there is a vast difference between dining, dancing, or even flirting with an agreeable young bachelor from nobody knows where, and binding yourself to him for the rest of your life.

Mr. Staunton, scenting incipient hostility in the air, put forth all his energies to check it, and was certainly successful in making himself very pleasant to everybody. He knew his world pretty well, and was aware that it was no mere coincidence that led several ladies, who had never before asked a single question of him about Lord Bellingham, to become suddenly and simultaneously interested in the head of the Staunton family. He was quite frank and good-humored in his attempts to gratify a curiosity which, under the circumstances, no sensible man could resent; and, although he was unable to give all the information requested, he displayed an incidental knowledge of family belongings and localities which sounded satisfactory.

“The fact is that I hear very little of my people nowadays,” he confessed. “I have been roaming

about the world for several years, and I am a poor correspondent, I am sorry to say."

After a time his questioners desisted from cross-examination, and allowed themselves to be amused by him, as usual. Even Arthur Brooke could not deny that Staunton was a very amusing fellow. He knew how to lead the talk, without monopolizing it; he had the knack of saying clever things which were not obtrusively clever; above all, he had acquired the somewhat rare art of helping others to show themselves at their best. Thus the party, which had not at first seemed to be quite free from elements of discord, ended by becoming a very merry one. Mrs. Vane, always vivacious, appeared to be in particularly good spirits, and displayed a friendliness to Mr. Staunton which was generally remarked. In the drawing-room, after dinner, she picked up one of those very unpleasant inventions, by means of which the air is made heavy with scent, and accidentally delivered a shower of spray full into Staunton's face; whereupon she promptly whipped out her pocket-handkerchief, and, bending over him in an almost maternal fashion, dried his forehead, while she apologized for her awkwardness. This little incident was not without its effect upon the bystanders. Mrs. Vane was rightly cred-

ited with great shrewdness, as well as with an exhaustive knowledge of the nobility and gentry of Great Britain and Ireland. Consequently, if Mrs. Vane took this man up, it was tolerably certain that there could be nothing wrong about him. After that her guests vied with one another in cordiality to her presumed *protégé*, and some of them began to wonder whether they would have to expend ten pounds in a wedding-present for Mrs. Lindsay, or whether five would suffice.

When they had all gone away, Arthur, who had been somewhat staggered by the behavior of his ally, was still more staggered by the first words that she addressed to him.

"Well," said she, quite coolly, "your friend is a *chevalier d'industrie*. Neither more nor less than that."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Arthur, aghast.

"You may well say so. I don't very much wonder at his having taken in the general public, because he really is extremely clever and plausible; but that you, who were inclined to suspect him all along, should have failed to find him out, is, I must confess, a little surprising to me."

"But how in the world did *you* find him out?" asked Arthur, admiringly.

She spread out her handkerchief, and held it up by two of its corners.

“Do you see anything remarkable there?” she inquired.

“I see a black smudge.”

“Exactly so—a pleasing souvenir of Mr. Staunton’s eyebrows. Men who have such very dark hair, and who shave themselves so very closely, are apt to become a little blue about the cheeks and chin towards six o’clock in the evening. I managed to get Mr. Staunton with his face to the sunset yesterday, and I saw that he wasn’t blue at all. When I inspected him more nearly, I felt morally convinced that he possessed a bottle of dye; but as one scrap of proof positive is worth any number of moral convictions, I squirted eau-de-cologne into his eyes this evening, and then wiped them—with the result that you see.”

“By Jove, what a scoundrel!”

“Dreadful, isn’t he? All the same, you’ll be so good as not to hurry off and denounce him at the Villa des Châtaigniers early to-morrow morning, which is what you are meditating. To dye the hair and eyebrows is not in itself a criminal act, and there is no greater mistake than declaring war before you are sure of victory. We can afford to be patient,

because we hold good cards. Mr. Staunton has very foolishly and needlessly committed himself to the statement that he is a cousin of Lord Bellingham's. I hope before long to confront him with Lord Bellingham in person; after which I suspect that we shall hear no more of his engagement to Beatrice. Beatrice, as perhaps you don't know, is just one of those weak, amiable people who turn obstinate when they are thwarted, and cling to an error a great deal more persistently than they ever cling to the truth. It would be worse than useless to talk to her about Mr. Staunton's eyebrows; we must drag his mask off in her presence, or she will only think that you are jealous and that I am prejudiced."

"I don't consider that at all a fair description of Beatrice," said Arthur, who, however much he himself might be incensed against his cousin, did not choose to hear her spoken against by others. "You can't expect every woman's eyes to be as sharp as yours."

Mrs. Vane laughed.

"My eyes are sharp enough to see that my sharpness must be its own reward, and that I shall get small thanks from you for all the trouble that I am giving myself," she remarked. "Fortunately, it will be reward enough for me to see Mr. Staunton's face when I produce Lord Bellingham at Cannes."

“And how are you going to produce Lord Bellingham? I thought you didn’t know him.”

“Nor do I; but I know a Mr. Warde, who is at present travelling with him in Italy. I need hardly say that I took care to inform myself about Lord Bellingham before I left England. It seems that he is a good-natured and rather rowdy sort of young man, who does what he is asked, if it isn’t too much trouble. I shall write to Mr. Warde to make him stop a day or two here on their way home, and when they arrive I shall ask Beatrice and Mr. Staunton to meet them. You may come too, if you think you would enjoy it.”

“To tell you the truth,” answered Arthur, “I am not sure that I should. I have no wish to see Beatrice put to shame. Wouldn’t it be more simple to write, and ask whether Lord Bellingham acknowledges this man as his cousin?”

“It would be more simple, but it would be less amusing, less dramatic, and less convincing. My belief is that conviction will not be brought home to Beatrice by anything short of the testimony of her own senses; added to which, I don’t want to let Mr. Staunton off too easily. Only have patience, keep your temper, leave things to me, and I will answer for it that all will be well.”

CHAPTER V.

A TRULY unselfish person will, no doubt, be ever ready to sacrifice his or her own interests to those of others, but will not invariably be disposed to let others have their own way, since that is anything but the surest method of promoting their interests. It is probable, therefore, that Beatrice Lindsay was not a truly unselfish person, although she was a sweet-tempered and lovable one. It was out of her power to be happy unless those about her were happy too ; all her life long she had been anxious, above everything, to satisfy them ; and thus her life had hitherto had a good deal more of anxiety than satisfaction in it. Few people would feel the disapproval of a child of fifteen to be a serious obstacle in the way of carrying out any scheme, but it was so felt by Mrs. Lindsay ; and, in truth, situated as Violet was, her sister's re-marriage concerned her more closely than such an event would have concerned most girls of her age.

“ You may say what you please, Beatrice, but you

won't make me believe that you really care for that detestable man," she declared; "and, even if you adored him, I should still hate him."

"You don't know how you distress me when you speak like that, Violet," sighed poor Mrs. Lindsay; "you almost make me wish that I had never seen Mr. Staunton."

"Then I shall go on speaking like that up to the last moment," returned the implacable Violet. "I shouldn't mind a bit how much I distressed you if I could get you to throw him over. You know you have been wretched ever since you accepted him."

"Of course I must be wretched when I see that you are. But, in reality, we both need some one to take care of us; and, whether you like Mr. Staunton or not, you must admit that he is capable of doing that."

"Why? Because he is so very capable of taking care of himself? I would rather trust a man like Arthur, who can't take care of himself at all. Arthur is stupid and aggravating, but, at least, he is honest. He wanted to marry you when you were poor, which is more than can be said for Mr. Staunton."

"It is not Mr. Staunton's fault that he did not know me when I was poor; and Arthur is probably

very glad now that he was not allowed to have what he wanted as a boy," returned Mrs. Lindsay. "I am sure I have done the right thing, and I hope you will see before long that it was the right thing."

Nevertheless, she was neither as certain nor as hopeful as she professed to be. She knew that she had acted hastily; she was astonished, and also, perhaps, a little disappointed, at Arthur's calm acquiescence in her choice, and Mrs. Vane's congratulations had puzzled rather than pleased her. Having pledged her word to Mr. Staunton, she had no idea of throwing him over, but if he had seen fit to treat her in that ungallant manner, she assuredly would not have broken her heart over his fickleness. It may even have been with some forlorn hope of inducing him to do so that she said to him, in the course of the same afternoon,

"I must tell you something which, perhaps, I ought to have told you before. It is about my cousin, Arthur Brooke. Years ago, when we were both quite young, he wanted to marry me, and, if there had not been difficulties about money, I think we should have been engaged. I feel that it is right to tell you that."

Mr. Staunton made no reply, but looked at her with a slight smile upon his lips; and at length she

asked, rather impatiently, "What are you thinking?"

"I am thinking," he answered, "that Captain Brooke is a most extraordinary man, and that I am a most fortunate one."

Mrs. Lindsay frowned. "I did not mean you to suppose that I would marry Arthur now, if he still wished it. Only, experiences of that kind make a difference in one's life; one cannot be quite the same after them. I never pretended to be in love with Mr. Lindsay, and I do not pretend to be in love with you. That is really what I wanted to say."

"My dear Beatrice," answered Staunton, gravely and kindly, "there is no occasion for you to tell me what I know only too well. I wish it could be otherwise; but I see that, at least for the present, it cannot be otherwise. You wonder, perhaps, that any man should desire to marry a woman who does not love him; but many such marriages do take place; and I don't believe that, as a rule, they turn out unhappily. One thing, however, is beyond all question; no woman ought to marry a man whom she does not love, when she is in love with some one else. I could not, and I will not, ask you to do that. I don't pretend that to lose you would not be the

heaviest misfortune that could fall upon me; but my love would be worth very little if I did not value your happiness more than my own."

He paused, and for a moment his generous suggestion was not very far from being closed with; but before Mrs. Lindsay could make up her mind what to say, he resumed: "I may not think—and, as a fact, I don't think—that Captain Brooke is very well suited by nature to be your husband; he seems to me to be wanting in decision and strength of character. But that, after all, is only a matter of relative importance. If you care for him as much as I am afraid that you do, all other considerations become trifling. Not only will I release you from your engagement to me, but I will do all in my power to bring about what you wish. I will speak to the man. I can't believe that, having once loved you, he can really be indifferent—"

"Please stop!" interrupted Mrs. Lindsay, holding up her hand; "you have altogether misunderstood me. I felt bound to let you know that I did not love you, and I told you that old story because I thought it might explain why I did not. On second thoughts, I dare say it doesn't explain it. At any rate, it is a very old story, which is quite over and done with, and we won't refer to it again. If you

are content to take me as I am no more need be said."

He bent over her hand, sighing, as he just touched it with his lips. "I am more than content," he said. "Some day, I hope, you will love me. Even now I am sure that you like me, and that you trust me."

"Yes," she answered; "I trust you."

"Your faith will be put to the test, perhaps. You will be told—you are quite certain to be told—that I am a fortune-hunter; that I am not a good enough match for you; that I am this, that, and the other. It isn't always easy to treat such charges with contempt, and there is only one way of putting a stop to them. I want you to agree that our marriage shall take place soon, Beatrice."

Mrs. Lindsay drew back a little. "What would you call soon?" she asked.

"Well, I think it would be better if we were married quietly here at the end of the season, after all the gossips have departed. Neither you nor I, I fancy, would much like a grand wedding in London, and I don't feel that I am in any way bound to surround myself with relations at the ceremony; do you?"

"N—no," she answered, hesitatingly. And then, after reflecting for a moment, "I dare say you are

right. There is no occasion for delay, and certainly none for festivities and rejoicings. I am afraid," she added presently, smiling at him, "that sounds very ungracious. I did not mean it so; but you understand how I feel about it, perhaps. Second marriages ought always to be quiet affairs."

He assured her that he understood her feelings as well as he understood his own; and so, very likely, he did. The world is full of humbugs of varying kinds and degrees; one meets them every day; and some are clever, some dull, some well-meaning, some cynical; but hardly among them all will one be found who, in deceiving others, does not to some extent deceive himself also. Mr. Staunton, so far as he could be said to take a pride in anything (but in truth he was not very proud), prided himself upon his complete immunity from self-deception; yet, as he walked away in the twilight, he felt very like an honest and honorable man. He was neither the one nor the other. He had never for an instant contemplated relaxing his hold upon Mrs. Lindsay and her fortune, and his offer to let her go free had been purposely worded in such a way that there had been no danger at all of her taking advantage of it. At the same time, a part of what he had said had been true; for he really loved the woman whom he

intended to marry ; and these two sensations of being in love and telling the truth were both so novel to him that it was no wonder if his mental balance was temporarily disturbed by them.

It was promptly restored by means of a remedy which never failed in his case—the sudden approach of danger. As he left the grounds of the villa a loudly dressed man, with a waxed mustache and many rings on his fingers, stepped out into the roadway before him, and said, with an exaggerated bow, “Good-evening, my lord. I trust I see your lordship in the enjoyment of tolerable health and spirits.”

Staunton stopped short at once, and faced this unattractive stranger, but made no answer.

“Oh,” said the man, “I know you, my dear Lord Charles, I do really ; though you have shaved off your beard and your hair has changed color, and your get-up is altogether a credit to you. Don’t be alarmed ; I admire your cheek beyond everything, and I wouldn’t spoil your little game for the world. But you mustn’t try to cut an old friend, you know.”

“I am not alarmed,” answered Staunton, shortly. “It would scarcely be to your interest to spoil what you call my little game, Jarvis ; and I imagine that

your own interest is more dear to you than anything else on earth."

"Naturally," agreed the other, linking his arm in Staunton's and leading him down the road. "My dear Lord Charles—by the way, what is your real name?"

"My real name is Staunton, if that matters."

"Well, my dear Staunton—so to call you—I was about to remark that your courage and talents have my warmest admiration. To pass yourself off as Lord Charles Templeton during a whole winter at a place like Florence, where the real Lord Charles, or one of his friends, might have turned up at any moment; to mix in the highest society; to live on the fat of the land; to decamp at the end of the season, leaving every blessed bill unpaid, and to be suspected by nobody, with one unworthy exception, up to the last—well, that certainly was a great and deserved success, and I can't wonder at your trying to repeat it. But aren't you presuming just a little bit too much upon the imbecility of your fellow-creatures this time? I had the pleasure of recognizing you some days ago, and since then I have made it my business to find out what you were up to. I congratulate you. It's a grand scheme; but how you expect to be able to work it out beats me,

I confess. Rich widows are not married without drawing up of settlements and a full inquiry on the part of the family, and a deuce of a lot of delay and fuss; and a bridegroom who calls himself Lord Bellingham's cousin, when he is no more related to Lord Bellingham than I am, is not unlikely to hear the banns forbidden, I should say."

"That is my affair, not yours," returned Staunton. "Of course I am in your power, and of course you will extort hush-money. As soon as I am married you can communicate with me, and you won't find me niggardly. Only I should advise you not to be too extravagant in your demands. If you stop my marriage, you kill the goose that lays the golden eggs; and your power to injure me after my marriage may be less than you imagine; because, unhappily, it is almost inevitable that my wife should discover, sooner or later, that I have deceived her to some extent."

"My dear Staunton, you quite affect me. I can't bear to think of your distress when your wife discovers that you have deceived her to some extent. As for my being extortionate, pray believe that I shall never be that. A small loan, from time to time, is all that I shall request of you. A small loan—say a couple of hundred—is all that I request now."

“Out of the question, Jarvis. I swear to you that a hundred and twenty-five pounds is the sum-total of my worldly possessions.”

“My good-nature will be the ruin of me!” sighed the other. “But that is what I am; I never could bring myself to be hard upon a friend. I’ll take a hundred, and be off to Monte Carlo by the next train.”

The contest that followed was long and animated; but in the end Mr. Jarvis, whose arguments were practically unanswerable, carried his point. He accompanied his friend to the hotel in which the latter was staying, where French notes to the value of a hundred pounds were duly counted out to him, and, having stowed away the booty securely in the breast-pocket of his coat, prepared to depart.

“I am unwilling to leave you, my dear Templeton-Staunton,” said he; “but it is some consolation to know that you are not unwilling to be left. In return for your comparative liberality, I have a piece of information to give you which may be found of interest. Your relative, Lord Bellingham, will arrive here the day after to-morrow. I was sitting behind him in the gardens at Monte Carlo yesterday, and I heard all about it. He doesn’t want to come to Cannes; but he is travelling with

a friend of the name of Warde, who does. They will only stay one night, and on that night they will be present at a party given by a certain Mrs. Vane, who, as I understand, is connected with your fascinating widow. Does your lordship smell a rat? It seems to me that I do, and I should strongly advise you to be called away on urgent business for a day or two. You may, on your return, find that your cousin, who has a shocking bad memory, has denied all knowledge of you; but even that would be a little less awkward than meeting him face to face. Good-bye. May you live long and prosper!"

CHAPTER VI.

IT will be perceived from the foregoing conversation that Mr. Staunton was no better than a swindler. Yet, like other sinners, he had his good qualities; and among these was that most excellent quality of courage, without which all the other virtues put together make but a poor show. He was, perhaps, a hero gone wrong; at any rate, he had the heroic attribute of loving danger for danger's sake, and it never for a moment entered into his mind to turn tail, as Jarvis advised. Nevertheless, he by no means under-estimated the peril which now threatened him. He had suspected all along that Mrs. Vane was less friendly to him than she appeared to be; he knew that all Cannes was to be present at the evening reception which she was about to hold; and, remembering that, only the day before, she had laughingly lamented the dearth of men, and had implored him to come early and stay late, without saying a word about the expected arrival of Lord Bellingham, he divined easily enough the plot

which she had laid for his discomfiture. Her plot must inevitably have succeeded, but for the opportune appearance of Jarvis; and the loss of a hundred pounds, serious though that was, was amply atoned for in Mr. Staunton's eyes by a piece of information which might save him the prospective loss of many thousands a year.

The direction which his counter-mine must take was speedily decided upon. It is obvious that those who do not intend to run away must face the enemy, and when the enemy is to be faced, it is generally best to advance against him, instead of awaiting his attack. This, in a metaphorical sense (for it need hardly be said that peace, not war, was his aim), Mr. Staunton made up his mind to do. He determined that he would seek out and conciliate Lord Bellingham, and, with the self-reliance of true genius, left the means of accomplishing his purpose to shape themselves in accordance with the manner of his reception, and the character of the man with whom he should be called upon to deal.

The next day but one found him sauntering up and down the platform of the railway-station on the arrival of the express from the eastward, and when he saw a tall, fair-haired youth of the "masher" type get out of a smoking-carriage, followed by a

merry-looking, round-faced little man, apparently his senior by some years, he felt little doubt but that these were the travellers of whom he was in search. A valet, who came up presently, addressed the fair-haired youth as "my lord," and Mr. Staunton, having seen the party take their places in the omnibus belonging to the Hotel Continental, on the top of which were piled many portmanteaus marked with a large B., strolled away, satisfied with the result of his reconnaissance. About an hour later he was at the Hotel Continental, inquiring for Lord Bellingham, and immediately afterwards he was shown into the presence of the young nobleman in question, whom he was not sorry to find alone.

"How do you do?" said Staunton, holding out his hand, which the other at once took. "I must apologize for looking you up so soon after your arrival; but the truth is that I am sent by my friend, Mrs. Vane, to remind you that she expects to see you at her party this evening."

"Oh—thanks, awfully," answered Lord Bellingham. "I hadn't forgotten, though. In point of fact, I have been brought here on purpose to go to this party. I don't know Mrs. Vane myself; but the man whom I am travelling with does, and he rather made a point of our stopping here to see her.

Won't you sit down and smoke a cigarette? Awfully hot, isn't it? I'll just ring and tell them to bring something to drink."

Staunton gladly accepted this proposition, and in less than ten minutes he and his entertainer were upon the best of terms. It has already been said that he possessed in a remarkable degree the power of suiting himself to his company, and it required no great penetration to guess what kind of man Lord Bellingham would be likely to consider a good fellow. Into such a man Mr. Staunton promptly became transformed. He spoke in familiar terms of several prominent racing men; he knew exactly why the favorite had not pulled off the City and Suburban; he had acquired, and was willing to communicate, a grand receipt for the manufacture of champagne cocktails; and, while preparing this enticing beverage, sent his companion off into shrieks of laughter by narrating a story about a well-known actress, which was not only extremely amusing, but quite new—as indeed it could hardly fail to be, seeing that he had invented it upon the spur of the moment.

It was only when Lord Bellingham remarked, "We are namesakes, I see; but I suppose we aren't related, are we?" that he answered carelessly, "Well,

as a matter of fact, I believe we are. That is, I am descended from your great-grandfather, one of whose sons emigrated to Canada, where I was born. Most likely you never heard of our branch of the family."

"Can't say I ever did," Lord Bellingham confessed. "As a general thing," he added, meditatively, and with a touch of irony which was assuredly not intentional, "if one has any relations in out-of-the-way places, they write and say so, don't you know."

At this moment Mr. Warde came in, and in reply to his quick, interrogative glance at the stranger, Lord Bellingham said: "Warde, let me introduce you to Mr. Staunton. We have just found out that we are connections—had the same grandmother, or something."

The frank cordiality of Mr. Warde's greeting was very reassuring to Mr. Staunton, who had not been free from disquieting doubts as to how far Mrs. Vane's friend might have been taken into her confidence. A very few questions and answers made it evident that that lady had kept her own counsel, with a view, no doubt, to insuring and enjoying a more effective triumph; and Staunton, who had thus far been successful beyond his hopes, felt very much inclined to abandon the resolution which he had

made to prevent Lord Bellingham from putting in an appearance at the party. To walk boldly into the room in company with that easy-going personage, and to obtain a public recognition of relationship from him, would be a victory indeed. It was quite true that a member of the Staunton family had emigrated to Canada in the latter part of the eighteenth century; but it was not true that he had left any descendants. Moreover, it would not quite have suited our friend to be spoken of as belonging to this far-away branch; for, although he had never stated in so many words that he was first cousin to the present holder of the title, he had certainly allowed as much to be inferred. It seemed best, therefore, to put away the seductive notion of hoisting Mrs. Vane with her own petard, and to revert to the simpler and safer expedient of keeping her petard out of her reach.

“About what time did you think of going to this entertainment to-night?” he asked, as he rose and picked up his hat and stick.

Lord Bellingham yawned. “I hadn’t thought about it,” said he. “It’s no end of a grind having to go there at all; especially as we must be off the first thing in the morning. What time ought we to show ourselves? Eleven o’clock?”

“ Oh, a little earlier than that, I think,” answered Staunton ; “ people don’t keep very late hours here. You had better both come and dine with me at my hotel about half-past seven, and we will all go on together afterwards. I don’t promise to give you a very first-class dinner ; but the champagne is drinkable.”

It is not every man who would care to accept hospitality from a total stranger, even though that stranger should claim to be distantly connected with him ; but Lord Bellingham was neither suspicious nor over particular. “ All right,” he said ; “ thanks very much. We’ll be with you at half-past seven, sharp. Don’t give us too much of your good champagne, that’s all ; we musn’t create a scandal in the society of Cannes on our first and only appearance in it.”

To give Lord Bellingham plenty of champagne was, however, exactly what Mr. Staunton proposed to do. Indeed, it was by that means that he hoped to avoid the creation of a scandal. He went back to his hotel in very good spirits to order dinner, and, chancing to encounter Arthur Brooke at the door, said, with a friendly nod :

“ We shall meet at Mrs. Vane’s to-night, I suppose ? What do you think of sharing a carriage to drive up there ? My cousin Bellingham and a friend

of his are coming to dine with me, so that we should just fill the trap."

Captain Brooke's countenance fell perceptibly. Mrs. Vane was mistaken then, and this man really was Lord Bellingham's cousin, after all! It was a great disappointment, and he could not help showing it; but he replied mechanically to Staunton's proposal that he should be delighted.

"Then perhaps you wouldn't mind just looking in and telling us when it's time to start," said the latter. "I won't ask you to join us at dinner," he added, confidentially, "because I know Bellingham is the sort of man that would bore you. He rather bores me too, for there is nothing that I detest so much as the practical jokes and bear-fighting which are his idea of amusement; but of course one must show some civility to one's own flesh and blood. *Au revoir!*" And, with a wave of his hand, he disappeared.

The study of comparative physiology is beginning to find favor with a generation which is enamoured of all the ologies; but it has made little progress as yet. Those who have attained to some practical mastery of that science are scarcely found among the ranks of the learned, and are for the most part disposed to apply their knowledge rather to the

lower orders of creation than to its lords. Many men will be able to tell you, almost at a glance, what are the peculiarities of disposition to be expected from a given horse or dog; but not many have Mr. Staunton's facility for classifying the human subject, although the indications are not less clear in the one case than in the other. When he informed Arthur Brooke that Lord Bellingham was given to practical jokes and bear-fighting, he was not drawing upon his imagination. He felt absolutely convinced that such must be the tastes of this young man; and during the course of dinner he made it his business to gratify them.

A cordial understanding having been firmly established by means of champagne, racy anecdotes, and divers feats of legerdemain, performed with forks, corks, bottles, and glasses, it was easy to persuade Mr. Warde (obviously a most good-natured person) to pick up a biscuit from the floor, and to profit by his stooping attitude to drop a morsel of ice down his back. If any doubt had remained in Lord Bellingham's mind as to Staunton's being quite one of the right sort, this exquisite piece of wit would have dissipated it. From that moment the fun became fast and furious, and the uproar which proceeded from the sitting-room of a gentleman

whose conduct had hitherto been exemplary in all respects caused no small astonishment among the other inmates of the hotel. Warde, to revenge himself, could do no less than take the first opportunity of deftly pulling Mr. Staunton's chair from under him. Then Lord Bellingham proposed cock-fighting, and showed himself a proficient in that form of combat. A little later a steeple-chase round the room on all-fours was organized, the fences being represented by chairs and the water-jump by Mr. Staunton's bath; and all this time fresh supplies of champagne were being constantly brought in by the grinning waiters.

Altogether, it was a merry meeting, and two members of the trio thoroughly enjoyed it. The third, despite his smiling countenance, was not quite so happy. The evening was fast slipping away; the hour mentioned on Mrs. Vane's invitation-cards had already passed; and Lord Bellingham, deep though his potations had been, was very far from being tipsy. The rules of physiology are not free from those exceptions for which every earnest seeker after truth must be prepared. By rights Lord Bellingham should have had a weak head: Nature, without rhyme or reason, had given him a strong one. Exhilarated he was, but not at all intoxicated, nor unfit

to enter Mrs. Vane's drawing-room. He was still capable of galloping round the room on his hands and feet; he could not be made to fall into the water-jump; and it was plain that some other method of keeping him out of society must be devised than that of rendering him temporarily unconscious.

It was while Staunton was anxiously turning over divers expedients in his mind that the door opened, and Captain Brooke, with a frowning countenance, entered. "I am sorry to disturb you," said he; "but it is a quarter to eleven, and the carriage has been waiting for the last half-hour."

"Hullo, Brooke!" cried Staunton, cheerily. "Come in and sit down. I don't know whether you have met Bellingham and Warde before? Have a glass of champagne."

"No, thank you," answered Arthur, stiffly. "We really ought to be going; it's a quarter to eleven, and—"

"All right," broke in Staunton; "heaps of time! I say, Bellingham, did you ever play the game of Spoof?"

"No," answered his lordship, with an anticipatory chuckle; "what is it?"

"I'll teach you. Capital game, and very simple, if you remember the rules. We all lay you a fiver

to one, and you mark. Do you see? Very well; we each begin by claiming something. For instance, I claim your coat. Take it off."

"Oh, come now, I say, bar sells!" said Lord Bellingham, laughing.

"It's all right, my dear fellow; you'll see how it works presently. Off with your coat!"

Lord Bellingham, still laughing, obeyed, and Staunton took possession of the discarded garment. "Now, Brooke," said he, "it's your turn. What do you claim?"

"Oh, I don't know—claim his shoes," answered Captain Brooke, to whom all this was very distasteful.

"Take 'em off," said Staunton, briskly. "Your turn, Warde."

"I claim his br—"

"No, no!" interrupted Staunton; "we must draw the line somewhere."

"Well, then, I claim his waistcoat."

"Take it off. Let me see—his coat, his waistcoat, and his shoes. Yes, I think that will be enough," murmured the introducer of this fascinating game, musingly. "I must have another man to come out of the room with me, though. Brooke, would you mind coming? I'll be with you again in

half a second," he added, nodding reassuringly to Lord Bellingham, who was staring at him open-mouthed.

Without more ado he caught Arthur by the arm, hurried him out of the room, and, the moment the door was shut, rushed down-stairs, across the hall, and into the carriage with him before his astonished prisoner could draw breath.

"What the devil! confound it all! what do you mean by this?" gasped Captain Brooke, indignantly, while he was being driven at a smart pace down the street.

"My dear Brooke," answered Staunton, "I apologize most sincerely to you for my want of ceremony; my only excuse is that there really was nothing else to be done. Didn't you see that the man was perfectly drunk? I couldn't have taken him to Mrs. Vane's house in that condition; I should never have dared to look her in the face again. I'm only thankful that my little stratagem succeeded so well. He'll be in a great rage; but he can't come after us without his clothes, and he'll end by returning to his hotel and going to bed, which is the best place for him. We must tell Mrs. Vane that he isn't quite well."

Arthur was not convinced that Lord Bellingham

had been drunk, but neither was he quite prepared to maintain the contrary. He did not at the moment see that Staunton could have any reason, save the one assigned, for acting as he had done. It seemed to be beyond a doubt that Lord Bellingham was really his cousin, and that Mrs. Vane's plot must in any case have failed. Therefore he only remarked, rather sullenly, "You had better undertake the excuses; I'm not particularly clever at humbugging people myself."

"You seem to imply that I am," observed Staunton, with a good-humored laugh. "You mean, perhaps, that I humbugged poor Bellingham by pretending to enjoy cock-fighting and jumping over the furniture, and all the rest of it. Well, I certainly do not enjoy disporting myself in that way, and I have spent a very fatiguing evening. If Mrs. Vane knew what trouble I have taken to save her from a little annoyance she would be grateful, I hope."

Being without the information referred to, Mrs. Vane naturally felt no gratitude to her tardy guest, nor was she any better pleased with him when he explained that he was the bearer of an apology from Lord Bellingham. She perceived at once that she had been outwitted, and while she was smilingly ex-

pressing her regrets to Mr. Staunton, she was saying within herself, "If I don't pay you out for this before I have done with you, my friend, I am a duller woman than most people are kind enough to think me, that's all!" She was less easily taken in than Arthur Brooke, who, when driven into a corner and catechised, could not deny that it was by his so-called cousin that Lord Bellingham had been prevented from keeping his engagement.

"The swindler is an uncommonly clever swindler," Mrs. Vane said, after she had extorted from Arthur all the information that she wanted. "He has scored against me this time, I admit; but he need not flatter himself that I am beaten. Depend upon it, if Lord Bellingham had been any relation of his, he would have brought him here, and taken good care to keep him sober. At any rate, the question will soon be set at rest; for I shall send a note to Mr. Warde, and request a categorical reply."

She was as good as her word; and her inquiries were perused in the train, on the following morning, by Mr. Warde, while his companion tore open and read a note which had been handed to him at the last moment.

"MY DEAR BELLINGHAM" (the latter communica-

tion ran),—"I hope you got your clothes back all right last night, and that you did not much regret being unable to attend one of the slowest parties it has ever been my misfortune to assist at. To tell you the honest truth, I had laid another fellow two tenners to one that you wouldn't show at Mrs. Vane's. For the last fortnight she has been bragging that you were coming here on purpose to be present at her dismal gathering, and I confess that I didn't believe that you, or anybody else, would be so astonishingly good-natured. Hence the wager, and the slight inconvenience to which I was obliged to put you. I think you would have been amused if you had seen the old woman's face when I told her that you didn't feel up to the fatigue of paying your respects to her. With many apologies,

"Yours very truly,

"GEORGE STAUNTON."

Lord Bellingham was certainly very good-natured. He had been somewhat incensed overnight by the trick played upon him; but the explanation given appeased his wrath, and he maintained his opinion that Staunton was one of the right sort, in spite of sundry doubts expressed by his friend Warde. The latter wrote a long letter to Mrs. Vane from London,

in which no mention was made of the interesting game of Spoof, and Staunton was only incidentally alluded to. "Bellingham says he believes that the man is a sort of a cousin of his," he wrote; "but doesn't know much about him. He seemed to be a cool customer—not a bad fellow, though, on the whole."

This evidence, so far as it went, was plainly rather in favor of the accused than against him, and Mrs. Vane, much disappointed, saw that she could make no use of it.

CHAPTER VII.

IN small communities, made up of people without regular occupation, no incident, however trivial, can escape notice. It was soon known that Lord Belingham had passed through Cannes, and that he had chosen to spend his one evening there with his cousin, rather than at Mrs. Vane's reception. This circumstance served to strengthen Staunton's position; it seemed to show that he was upon good terms with his family, and made people feel that his approaching marriage with the rich Mrs. Lindsay, which was no longer even a nominal secret, would not, after all, be a *mésalliance*. What was still a secret from the gossips was that the wedding-day had been actually fixed, and that the ceremony was to take place at Cannes in a few weeks' time. This intelligence had been provisionally kept even from Captain Brooke; nor would Mrs. Vane have been informed of it had it been possible to conceal the existence of such a project from the ladies'-maids, those terrible detectives of domestic life.

When Mrs. Vane's maid, albeit sworn to secrecy, let the cat out of the bag, her mistress, in genuine consternation, hurried off to the Villa des Châtaigniers to protest against what she did not hesitate to call an act of downright lunacy.

"My dear Beatrice," said she, "you can't accuse me of having uttered one word in opposition to your engagement until now. I may have had my own opinions about it; but I have kept them to myself. If you prefer a man about whose antecedents you are absolutely ignorant to certain others whom I could name, and who have not only adored you for years, but can show an unblemished record, that is your affair. But if you must and will marry Mr. Staunton, for Heaven's sake let it be done in the light of day! Don't allow yourself to be inveigled into a hole-and-corner marriage. Why should he wish for it? Why should he object to be married in England, like other people? You must pardon my saying that to me it has an uncommonly fishy look. What if you should discover, too late, that he has a wife and six children elsewhere? What if you should discover—"

"I can't listen to this!" exclaimed Mrs. Lindsay. "If you had such horrid suspicions of Mr. Staunton, why didn't you announce them a little sooner? You

should not have pretended to like him, and to think that I had done wisely in accepting him, if you were really against him all the time. As for our being married abroad, that is as much my wish as his. He has been very kind to me; I am sincerely attached to him; and I can't imagine who are the people of unblemished record who, as you say, have 'adored me for years.'"

"I used the plural number for oratorical purposes," answered Mrs. Vane, with a laugh. "Strictly speaking, I should have kept to the singular, and said 'a person.' The more so, as he is a decidedly singular person to go on adoring you after the way in which you have treated him."

"There is no such person," returned Mrs. Lindsay, impatiently. "You let your imagination run away with you. You are always taking it into your head that certain couples are suited to each other, and you will have it that they must want to marry, whereas, in reality, they probably want nothing of the sort. I only hope that you won't be so inconsiderate as to speak in this way to—to any one else."

Considerately or inconsiderately, that was what Mrs. Vane intended to do. She went home, summoned Captain Brooke without further delay, and

informed him of the very serious turn that matters had taken.

“We can’t afford to beat about the bush any longer, Arthur,” she said. “I have no idea of allowing both you and Beatrice to be made miserable for want of a little plain speaking. You have both been rather foolish. You were foolish not to propose to her as soon as you came here, and she was foolish to engage herself to this man out of pique. Fortunately, however, no irreparable act of folly has been committed yet. It would have been pleasanter to bring you together in a more leisurely and diplomatic fashion, and I should have been glad to put the estimable Staunton to the humiliation of a public exposure; but we shall have to forego these luxuries; there really isn’t time for them. You must pocket your pride, go straight to Beatrice, and have a full explanation. Now don’t begin arguing, because I sha’n’t listen to you, but be off as fast as you can.”

Captain Brooke obeyed, with a mental reservation. For reasons which seemed to him sufficient, he was determined not to reveal the state of his personal feelings to his cousin; but he was quite equally determined that she should not marry Staunton, if he could prevent her from doing so. When he reached

the Villa des Châtaigniers his task was made easy for him by Mrs. Lindsay, who said at once:

"I can see from your face what has brought you here. Mrs. Vane has sent you to tell me that it isn't at all the proper thing to be married at Cannes."

"I have heard from Mrs. Vane," answered Arthur, "what I must say that I should have expected to hear from you. Whether you are to be married at Cannes or elsewhere, I cannot see why you should make a mystery of your intentions."

"I waited until everything was settled before telling you," returned Mrs. Lindsay, "because I knew that you would object. And it is evident that you do object."

"I certainly do. If it were only that you wished to be married quietly, I should have nothing more to say; but I can't help taking into consideration that Staunton is still virtually a stranger to you."

"Exactly so. Your objection is to him, not to my being married in one place rather than another."

"My objection is to your doing anything in haste. It is only fair and right that we should ask Mr. Staunton to give some more exact account of himself than we have had from him yet. He may be a

gentleman and an honest man; but then, again, he may not. Perhaps I had better be frank, at the risk of making you angry, and say that I fear he is not."

"Have you any reason in the world for doubting him, Arthur?"

"Yes; several. I will mention one which, to my mind, is very significant: he dyes his hair."

"I don't believe it for a moment. And what if he does?"

"He most undoubtedly does; and unless his motive is to disguise himself, it would be interesting to know what his motive is. Will you ask him that question?"

"No," answered Mrs. Lindsay, firmly, "I will not. I did not accept him because his hair was black, and I should not have refused him if it had been scarlet. I dare say you think that you are doing your duty by putting obstacles in the way of my marriage, Arthur—or, at any rate, Mrs. Vane, who instigates you, thinks so—but really, if you will believe me, you are only wasting time and breath. I have made up my mind, and I shall not alter it now."

And, indeed, he found that there was no persuading her to alter it. He began by being very cool, quiet, and sensible; but by degrees he lost hold of

himself, descended from counsel to entreaty, and ended by breaking out into a declaration which he had resolved that nothing should induce him to make.

“Beatrice,” he exclaimed, “I can’t bear to see you sacrifice yourself in this way! I don’t believe that you have any real love for Staunton, and I know that you once cared for me a little. I have never ceased to love you. I would not tell you so before, because, even if you had been willing to accept me, it seemed to me that I could not marry you and live upon Mr. Lindsay’s money. But now I don’t know that I was not wrong. With me you would at least be safe; you would know that, so far from wanting your fortune, I would a great deal rather that you had none; and though I should have nothing to offer you but love, I am not sure that that is a thing to be despised. Beatrice—is it too late?”

She turned a little pale, but answered, firmly, “Yes, Arthur, it is too late. You yourself would not think very well of any other woman who broke her word as you ask me to break mine, and if I had known what you were going to say, I should have stopped you. But there is no reason why we should not always be friends. About Mr. Staunton it is impossible that we should agree, because I believe in him and you don’t. You can’t give any ground

for your suspicions, except an absurd assertion that he dyes his hair—”

“Nor can you for your faith,” interrupted Arthur, eagerly. “Allow me, and allow yourself, a little more time to make inquiries. That is all that I ask for; and surely it is a reasonable enough request?”

Mrs. Lindsay, however, would not admit it to be so. People of weak resolution are seldom open to argument or persuasion: what they require, and, indeed, prefer, is to receive commands. Arthur, who did not feel himself entitled to take up a commanding tone with his cousin, pleaded in vain for delay, and went away at last with a heavy heart, having completely failed in his mission. The only hope that remained to him was that in the course of the next few weeks some chance clew might be obtained to the story of Staunton's past career; and when he considered how remote he was from all the ordinary sources of information, that hope seemed to him almost too forlorn a one to be worth taking into account.

CHAPTER VIII.

MEANWHILE, Mr. Staunton, who seemed to be carrying everything before him, was really in a position of no slight difficulty and embarrassment. He had spoken nothing but the truth in asserting that £125 was all the ready money that he possessed in the world; and when he was relieved of four fifths of that amount by the inexorable Jarvis, it was quite clear to him that he would ere long be compelled to beg, borrow, or steal. To live upon credit for an indefinite time is perfectly possible, so far as the major expenses of life are concerned; but no man can get on without a certain outlay of pocket-money. Staunton's five-and-twenty pounds were soon reduced to ten; and it was while he was ruefully contemplating, one morning, the handful of gold coins which represented his entire capital that a knock at his door was followed by the entrance of the landlord of the hotel, who came, with profuse bows, and still more profuse apologies, to request payment of a bill which

had now been running on for upwards of two months.

Staunton laughed, and glanced at the portentously long document in question. "I am quite ashamed of my forgetfulness," said he; "but really I am afraid I have hardly money enough by me to pay you this morning. I shall be receiving remittances from home in a day or two, and then, if you will be so good as to remind me again, I will discharge my debt."

This was said in such an easy, matter-of-course tone that the landlord, though much tempted to ask for a small sum on account, lacked the courage to do so, and withdrew, redoubling his bows and apologies.

He left behind him an ingenious gentleman in sore perplexity. Staunton was aware that, if the worst came to the worst, he might borrow what he required from Mrs. Lindsay, to whom he had never pretended that he was a rich man, and who, he felt sure, would be easily deceived by some trumped-up story about an unexpected demand upon his resources; but, oddly enough, the meanness of that expedient repelled him. His love for Beatrice may not have been worth much; but, so far as it went, it was genuine. He dreaded lowering himself in

her esteem ; since his meeting with Lord Bellingham he had begun to hope that she might be kept all her life in ignorance of his true origin ; and he fully intended to be a kind and faithful husband to her. Therefore, although his conscience did not forbid him to marry her under false colors, he felt unable to beg her for a loan to pay his hotel bill. Not many of us, let us hope, are potential swindlers ; but it is possible that some of us may be as illogical in our scruples as Mr. Staunton.

After a time, an alternative course suggested itself to him. It was a somewhat risky one ; but a man whose whole existence had for years been one long risk was scarcely likely to be deterred from adopting it on that account. He glanced at his watch, strolled down to the station, and took the afternoon train for Monte Carlo with a heart almost as light as his pocket. He felt that he was entering the lists against fortune under exceptionally favorable conditions ; because there was no telling what sums might not be won by ten stakes of a pound each ; whereas it was certain that he could not really lose, since a capital of ten pounds and a capital of zero are, for all practical purposes, much the same thing.

This, at least, was what he said to himself while

smoking a cigarette in the railway carriage; but his views became somewhat modified when the rake of the indifferent croupier drew away the last of his gold pieces. At that moment he felt that a further capital of ten pounds would have been invaluable to him. Ordinarily lucky at all games of chance, he was convinced that the sharp run of adverse fortune which had caused him to lose his stake each time that he laid it down must, in the nature of things, be followed by a run of success, and immediately after his compulsory retirement from the tables he had the mortification of seeing the change which he had anticipated take place. It was a matter of sheer necessity that he should carry some money away with him, and he glanced quickly round the room in search of an acquaintance from whom he might borrow a few napoleons. As chance would have it, the only familiar countenance that he discerned was that of a gentleman with a waxed mustache, who had already noticed him, and who now responded to his nod by an affable wave of the hand.

“How is the amiable and talented Mr. Staunton?” inquired this person, jocosely; “and what has he come to this lovely retreat for? To gather orange-blossoms?”

"Look here, Jarvis," said Staunton, in a rapid undertone, "I must have some money. I'm dead broke—just lost my last penny. Give me twenty pounds, and I'll pay you back before the evening is over."

Jarvis shook his head reprovingly. "This is not what I should have expected from a man of your sagacity," answered he. "You ought to know that I have the honor to belong to the borrowing, not to the lending, division. Apply elsewhere, my too-confiding friend."

"For the moment I have nowhere else to apply," returned Staunton, impatiently. "The hotel people at Cannes have begun to press for payment, and unless I can stop their mouths, there will be a row which may very likely cause my engagement to be broken off. That, I presume, would not suit your book."

Mr. Jarvis continued to shake his head. "Always reckless! always improvident!" he exclaimed, lifting his hands with mock solemnity. "And then you come to a poor devil like me to ask for money! Does the lovely and accomplished widow decline to part, then?"

But Mr. Staunton was not in the mood to put up with delicate badinage of this kind. "I don't

know whether you are aware, Jarvis," said he, quietly, "that I could with very great ease give you such a thrashing as would prevent your showing that impudent face of yours in public for a week or so. If you say another disrespectful word about that lady, I'll do it. As for the money, you may judge for yourself whether it isn't worth your while to risk a few pounds out of that hundred that I gave you the other day."

Perhaps Mr. Jarvis concluded that it would be worth his while; possibly, also, the menacing look in the other's eye may have had some effect upon him; for his personal courage was not of a high order. At any rate, he produced a hundred francs from his pocket, and Staunton, taking possession of this small sum, returned to the tables.

As matters fell out, a fifth of it would have sufficed to bring about the desired result. From the moment that Staunton's first stake of one napoleon was returned to him doubled, he never ceased to win until he rose from his chair. The pile of notes and gold before him soon reached imposing dimensions; the attention of the bystanders became riveted upon this impassive gambler, who, playing with calculated audacity, backing one color until the chances were strongly against its passing again, and revers-

ing his tactics, as if by instinct, just when a change came, seemed to be incapable of losing, whether his stakes were heavy or light. His calm demeanor showed a marked contrast to that of Jarvis, who, with trembling fingers and flushed cheeks, was following his lead, and who was half enchanted with his own gains, half furious with himself for being too timid to imitate his model's boldest strokes.

After something over an hour's play Staunton gathered together his spoil, got up quietly, and walked away. He had now realized a sum sufficient not only to pay his hotel bill, but to leave him a comfortable balance in hand, and, with rare moderation, he decided to pause in the moment of victory. Jarvis hurried after him, gasping and protesting. A tall, gray-bearded man, who for some time past had been scrutinizing the pair curiously from the background, followed them out of the building and into the gardens.

"You lunatic!" Jarvis exclaimed; "what are you dreaming about to desert your luck like this? It was good to last another half-hour! You might have broke the bank!—you might have—"

"Lost all that I had won," interrupted Staunton, coldly. "I have attained my object, and I am satisfied. Also I want to catch the 8.30 train to Cannes.

Here are your hundred francs. And now, Jarvis, I have a word or two to say to you. Don't run away with the idea that you have found an inexhaustible mine of wealth in me. I may be worth something to you, or I may be worth nothing at all; it just depends upon how much or how little my wife may happen to discover about my past adventures after we are married. I need hardly say that I shall not pay you blackmail out of pure love for you. If you become a nuisance, I shall either deny your statements *in toto*—and you will have to bring very convincing proofs in order to be believed—or I shall take the wind out of your sails by confessing the truth to her on my own account. I hope I make myself clear.”

“You do, my lord,” answered Jarvis, resuming his customary tone of cumbrous irony. “You may rely on my discretion; and as for my modesty, you have already had abundant evidence of that. It grieved me to see you turn your back upon your luck just now; but I am beginning to feel that all is for the best. If you are contented, so am I. Go in peace, and rest assured that no one will read the announcement of your nuptials with more heartfelt satisfaction than your humble servant. Should you be in need of a friend to undertake the functions of best man—”

"Good-night," said Staunton, cutting short this address unceremoniously, and turning on his heel.

"Good-night, my dear Staunton, good-night. May we meet again, under still more auspicious circumstances, ere long!"

The man with the gray beard had been hovering, unobserved, in the neighborhood during this brief conversation, and had seized a few words of it. As soon as Staunton was out of sight, he advanced to the still smiling Jarvis, raised his hat, and said, in deliberate, level accents which betrayed his transatlantic origin, "Excuse me, sir, but is the name of the gentleman who has just left you Staunton or Lord Charles Templeton?"

Jarvis, a good deal taken aback, fixed what he intended for a haughty stare upon the intruder, and twirled his mustache.

"The gentleman who has just left me, sir," replied he, "is Mr. Staunton."

"So I have been surprised to hear him called by you. A year ago, however, unless I am much mistaken, he was Lord Charles Templeton."

"I imagine," returned Jarvis, "that you are much mistaken. Very much mistaken."

"In that case, sir, it is my painful duty to inform

you that you have been imposed upon by a swindler. I do not blame you ; I myself, who ought to have been less easily deceived than most people, was taken in by him last winter at Florence, where he passed himself off as the nobleman whom I have mentioned."

"You do not seem to be aware," observed Jarvis, loftily, "that Lord Charles Templeton is not a nobleman."

"I confess that I was not aware of it. I am an American, and, therefore, deplorably ignorant. I was under the impression that a lord was a nobleman ; but your friend, at all events, is neither. I think he mentioned Cannes to you as his destination ? Probably he has been preying upon society in that place, and I shall make it my business to follow and expose him."

This was sad hearing for Mr. Jarvis, who saw his prospect of a comfortable annuity becoming gravely compromised, and who could think of nothing better to say than, "Pardon me, Mr. Staunton is now on his way to Genoa."

"I assure you," returned the stranger, quite unmoved, "that I distinctly heard him state that he proposed to catch the 8.30 train for Cannes. I was in hopes that you might be able to oblige me with

his address; but that is of little consequence. I anticipate no difficulty in discovering him."

"Now, my dear sir," remonstrated Jarvis, "is it likely that you know my friend's plans better than I do? And even if you are right, and I misunderstood what he told me as to his destination, how very foolish you will look when you bring this charge against him, and it turns out that you have discovered a mare's nest! Mr. Staunton is a gentleman of good family, as everybody knows, and he is first cousin to Lord Bellingham."

"That may be so," replied the other, calmly; "but I suppose it is possible for a lord to be so unfortunate as to have a swindler for his cousin. If the suggestion shocks you, I will ask you to excuse it on the score of my ignorance. Being, as I have said, an American, I am not very well acquainted with the proprieties and privileges of an aristocracy; but I am pretty well acquainted with Mr. Staunton, and if it would interest you to see how he looks when he is brought face to face with Mr. Howland, of New York, I shall be very happy to have you accompany me to Cannes."

Mr. Jarvis, however, did not think fit to accept this offer. He wagged his head mournfully, and said: "If your suspicions are correct, Mr. Howland,

it would be in the last degree painful to me to witness the disgrace of one whom I have hitherto both liked and respected. But I must still venture to hope that the case is one of mistaken identity. Good-evening to you."

And thereupon he retired somewhat hastily. The truth was that it was not difficult to frighten Mr. Jarvis, whose habits had for many years been such as are scarcely conducive to steadiness of nerve, and who did not relish the prospect of being pilloried as Staunton's confederate. Only some hours later, while he was ruminating dolefully in bed over the mischance which had occurred, did it strike him that this might yet be turned to some profitable account. Since Staunton could not be saved, why should he not be denounced? The informer's part, if not a very noble, can easily be made a lucrative one, and doubtless Mrs. Lindsay would be willing to pay handsomely for information which should rescue her from becoming an impostor's wife. He calculated that, by starting for Cannes on the following morning, he would get a clear twenty-four hours' advantage of Mr. Howland, whose investigations were likely to take up some little time, and could hardly bring about an immediate bursting of the bubble.

“And so,” thought he, with a chuckle, “I shall not only turn an honest penny for myself, but score off that infernal officious Yankee. I am sorry for poor Staunton’s disappointment; but I remember that he was extremely rude to me this evening. Besides, his was a nefarious career. Upon second thoughts, I’m not sorry for him, after all.”

With which comfortable conclusion Mr. Jarvis turned over and went to sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

THERE was one eventuality upon which the astute Jarvis had not counted, and could scarcely be expected to count. Mr. Howland's manner had betrayed no sign of such feverish haste as would be implied by his taking the ten-o'clock train to Cannes that same night. Nevertheless, being a man of business, and one who knew the value of time, that was what he did; and thus it came to pass that at an early hour next morning he had found out all that he had anticipated hearing, and a little more into the bargain.

Chance caused him to put up at the very hotel in which Staunton was sojourning; a glance at the strangers' book made him aware of that circumstance; and the result of a few casual questions addressed by him to the landlord over a matutinal cigar was that Arthur Brooke, who was lingering at breakfast, and debating whether or not he should accept an invitation to luncheon which had just reached him from his cousin, was surprised by the

entrance of an elderly stranger of benevolent aspect and self-possessed manners.

"How do you do, Captain Brooke?" the stranger said. "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Howland, and I have been for many years engaged in business in New York city, where I had occasion to make the acquaintance of one Staunton, who is, I believe, identical with the person of that name said to be now engaged to be married to a relation of yours. Thinking that you might be interested in hearing of a certain episode in the life of that person, I have taken the liberty to call upon you."

Arthur's eyes glistened with satisfaction. "Pray sit down, Mr. Howland," said he. "Any information that you can give me about Mr. Staunton will be most welcome."

"Well," answered Mr. Howland, seating himself, "the information that I have to give you about Mr. Staunton is not to his advantage; but maybe it will be none the less welcome on that account. I know he is an impostor, and, if he is the man that I believe him to be, he is also a thief."

"I was sure of it!" exclaimed Arthur, involuntarily.

"That he was a thief?"

“No; that he was an impostor. It’s much the same thing. But don’t let me interrupt you. You were saying that you made his acquaintance in New York?”

“Yes, sir. It is something over a dozen years ago that he was taken into our employment as clerk, his age being then, I should say, about eighteen or nineteen. Where he came from I can’t tell you, except that he was a Canadian; perhaps we are rather less particular about past character in America than you are over here. We are apt to judge of a man by his capability, and young Staunton’s business capabilities were considerable. He was a smart lad; he had opportunities of rendering us some valuable services; and, as a reward, he was promoted to a post of greater confidence than would have been open, in the ordinary course of things, to so young a man. I need not weary you with details; it is sufficient to say that an occasion presented itself when he was intrusted with a very large sum of money on behalf of the firm. Whether this was what he had been trying for all along, or whether, as was represented on his side at the trial, he gave way to an overwhelming temptation, is immaterial. He made off for Canada with that money, sir, disguised as a woman, and was only captured after a very daring at-

tempt at escape. The detectives arrested him in the cars, and he contrived to break away from them and jump clear out on to the track. I suppose, if he had been an honest man, he must have been killed; as it was, his injuries were found to be comparatively trifling. His counsel made a good deal of capital out of the incident, pointing out that he had preferred death to dishonor, and so forth; and though the court said that wasn't relevant, I guess it was taken into consideration when sentence was passed. He had to serve a pretty fair term of imprisonment with hard labor, though."

"And are you sure that this is the same man?" asked Arthur, eagerly.

"Yes, sir, I am sure; but I wouldn't affirm it on oath. I recognized him last night at the gaming-tables at Monte Carlo; but it wasn't just at first that I recognized him as being my old clerk Staunton."

Arthur stared. "Do you mean that you recognized him as being somebody else, then?" he inquired.

"Just so. I will explain. When I went to Florence last spring, I found everybody talking about a young man of the name of Lord Charles Templeton, who had been spending the winter there, and had been taken into high favor, it appeared, by the so-

ciety of the place, both native and foreign. He behaved like a man of fortune, entertained pretty freely, made himself particularly agreeable to the ladies, and enjoyed quite a reputation for talent. I saw him twice—once at a ball and once at the races in the Cascine, where he ran a horse, and didn't seem to care much whether it won or lost—and I am ashamed to say that I no more suspected him of being Staunton than of being Lorenzo the Magnificent. Shortly after I left I heard that he had vanished, leaving all his bills unpaid, and having borrowed money from most of his acquaintances. In process of time some of them heard that the real Lord Charles Templeton had never left England that winter, and then it seems to have dawned upon them that they had been swindled. Well, sir, I had matters of greater personal interest to occupy my attention, and I thought no more about this man until last night, when I went to have a look at the gambling at Monte Carlo, and saw him winning money as fast as he could pull it in. I knew him at once, though he had shaved off the fair beard which he wore when he was Lord Charles, and had dyed his hair black. The change made him look some years younger, and I suppose it was seeing his face without any hair about it that set me wondering why it should seem

so familiar to me. After I had watched him for some time, it suddenly flashed across me who he was. When he left the rooms with a friend, I followed him out into the garden, where I heard his friend call him Staunton; and as he mentioned that he was leaving immediately for Cannes, I thought I could do no better than pack up and pursue him by the next train."

"And did you really come here to warn us of our danger?" asked Arthur. "We are extremely indebted to you, Mr. Howland."

"Don't mention it, sir. I came here to fulfil a public duty; I was quite unaware until this morning that there was any project of a marriage between this scoundrel and an unsuspecting lady. I am sorry to find that such is the case, but glad that I have arrived in time to avert the catastrophe."

Arthur paused for a few seconds. He could not but rejoice at the confirmation of his suspicions; but he was generous enough to feel for poor Beatrice, whose humiliation, he knew, would be only less complete than that of her unprincipled suitor, and whom he was anxious to spare, so far as might be possible.

"I must tell you, Mr. Howland," said he, "that my cousin has been thoroughly imposed upon, and that your unsupported assertion may not be suffi-

cient to convince her. You yourself say that you could not swear to the man's identity. Staunton, too, is a cool-headed fellow. You may be sure that he will have presence of mind enough to laugh at the statement that he is an impostor and a thief."

"I take it," answered Mr. Howland, "that the chief thing is to induce your cousin to postpone her marriage—she must be strangely infatuated if she declines to do that—and I can easily furnish you with the addresses of several people who were in Florence last year, and who will be able to say whether Mr. Staunton is identical with the *soi-disant* Lord Charles Templeton. As for his being identical with my former clerk, I would willingly swear to that if I could contrive to get a glimpse of his right fore-arm. In his leap from the cars he inflicted wounds upon that part of his person of which he will undoubtedly bear the traces to his dying day."

"If that is all," answered Arthur, to whom a bright idea suggested itself at this moment, "I think I can arrange it. I am going to luncheon to-day at my cousin's, where Staunton is sure to be of the party. Will you allow me to take you with me, and introduce you as a friend of mine? I can promise you a welcome."

Mr. Howland replied that nothing would give him greater pleasure.

"Then we will consider that settled," said Arthur. "Please do not seem to recognize Staunton until I give you a hint. Of course he will recognize you; but he is not likely to betray himself, and it will be impossible for him to retreat. It is just upon the cards that there may be a scuffle; but if you and I can't manage him between us he must be a more powerful fellow than he looks."

Mr. Howland, who was tall and broad-chested, smiled. "I guess we shall be able to manage him, sir," said he, quietly.

Mrs. Lindsay took the arrival of her uninvited guest as a matter of course, and received him with the amiability which she was accustomed to show to all guests. During Arthur's stay at Cannes more than one friend of his had passed through the place, and had been introduced by him to the hospitality of the Villa des Châtaigniers; so that no apology or explanation was required in the present instance. But Mrs. Vane, who was sitting in the drawing-room when the two men entered, and whose inquisitive mind never accepted anything as a matter of course, saw at once that Mr. Howland did not belong to the class from which Captain Brooke's friends were usually recruited.

“Who, what, and why?” she whispered, concisely, as soon as she found an opportunity of drawing Arthur aside.

“A New York merchant, a savior of society upon a small scale, and brought here for reasons which will shortly appear,” he replied.

“Do you mean to say that you have found a man who can help us?”

“Possess your soul in patience, and in due time you shall see what you shall see,” answered Arthur, oracularly. Perhaps he was not sorry to be able to show his clever coadjutor that she was not the only person who could achieve a *coup de théâtre* upon occasion.

Before Mrs. Vane had time to make any rejoinder Staunton was announced. Arthur, watching him intently, could not help admiring the man’s perfect self-command. Mr. Howland must have been about the last person in the world whom he expected, and certainly the last whom he desired, to meet; yet his discomposure was so slight and so momentary that no one who had not been on the lookout for something of the kind would have detected it. He did not start, but only paused for one second; then advanced quickly, apologizing to Mrs. Lindsay for being late, and placing himself, as usual, with his

back to the light. His introduction to the supposed stranger was effected without the slightest sign of recognition on either side ; immediately after which the whole party adjourned to the dining-room.

During luncheon, the burden of keeping up conversation was sustained chiefly by Mr. Howland and Mrs. Vane. Mr. Staunton seemed less desirous of putting himself forward than usual, and Arthur observed that his eyes kept returning again and again, as if involuntarily, to the face of the American, whose bland, deliberate utterances were addressed impartially to each of the company in turn.

“Did you ever visit the United States, Mr. Staunton?” he inquired, after a time, in the tone of one who asks a question not so much for the sake of getting an answer as of giving his interlocutor something to talk about.

“Oh, yes, frequently,” answered Staunton. “In fact, I have visited most parts of the world.”

“I once,” remarked Mr. Howland, pensively, “knew a young Englishman or Canadian of your name ; but our relations were not of the most agreeable kind.”

“In that case,” said Staunton, laughing, “I trust he was no connection of mine.”

“I trust not, indeed ; for he robbed my firm of

a large sum of money, and I have heard that since he came out of prison he has been living by his wits, and passing himself off under various aliases as a man of fortune."

Mrs. Vane pricked up her ears, and Staunton, though maintaining an air of smiling indifference, turned a shade paler; but Mr. Howland, as though suddenly remembering that his remarks might be disagreeable, hastened to add:

"Of course, this man can have had nothing whatsoever to do with you, sir. Indeed, he did not look like you. He was a light-haired, fair-complexioned youth at the time that I knew him. He must be a man of thirty or more now, if he is still alive."

Staunton laughed again. "Let us hope that he is dead," said he. "I should be sorry to think that I had such a disreputable namesake going about the world."

Mrs. Lindsay looked slightly annoyed. She thought Mr. Howland might very well have kept that reminiscence to himself, and the many insinuations which had been made against her future husband caused her to feel convinced that both Arthur and Mrs. Vane would at once try to trace some connection between him and the criminal alluded to. She changed the subject, and soon rose from

her seat, after glancing interrogatively at Mrs. Vane."

That lady was on the tiptoe of joyous expectation. She could not do otherwise than obey her hostess's invitation; but she obeyed it with some reluctance, knowing that, in that house, it was the custom for the men to linger in the dining-room or the conservatory and smoke a cigarette with their coffee. At the door she turned back, and threw an appealing glance at Arthur, which he rightly interpreted to mean, "For pity's sake, let me be in at the death!" but he made no responsive signal. Indeed, he did not intend that she should witness the overthrow of the enemy; for he could devise no means of enabling her to do so without including his cousin also among the spectators, and his chief wish now was that Beatrice should experience no distress which could be avoided.

For Staunton, however, he felt neither sympathy nor compassion, and as soon as the door had closed behind the ladies he drew a long breath of satisfaction, saying to himself, "Now for it!"

CHAPTER X.

THE luncheon party had not been graced by the presence of Miss Violet Brooke. "Arthur can eat and drink with Mr. Staunton if he chooses," she had said, shortly after her sister's engagement was announced. "I don't think it is very honest of him, because he hates the man just as much as I do; still, if he chooses to do it he can. But I will not."

And to this determination she had held inexorably, in spite of all that her sister could urge. As often as Mr. Staunton was invited, or invited himself, to break bread at the Villa des Châtaigniers, so often did Violet express her intention of eating her own luncheon or dinner in company with Hopkins, a faithful old servant, who, as she was wont to declare, was the only rational person left in the house. By which she meant that Hopkins was the only person who would listen without protestation to wholesale abuse of Mr. Staunton.

Upon the day to which the course of this narrative has now brought us Violet lunched with Hop-

kins as usual, and, as usual, solaced herself by the delivery of some trenchant criticisms upon her future brother-in-law. Then, having ascertained that the subject of her remarks was still in the dining-room, and likely to be there for some time longer, she whistled to Snap, and strolled out into the garden. She had not taken many steps when Snap, that unerring judge of character, announced, by cocking his ears and uttering a low growl, that he espied a person of suspicious aspect, and immediately afterwards, unable to contain himself, he burst into a volley of barks, and dashed, full speed, down the avenue, at a very fashionably dressed gentleman, who turned and fled precipitately, picking up a stone as he ran.

Violet called the dog in, and beckoned, somewhat imperiously, to the intruder.

"You need not be so much alarmed," she said; "Snap will not bite you so long as I am here; but you are very much mistaken if you think he is the kind of dog to be driven away with a stone."

"I apologize," answered the stranger, with a bow and a grin. "I was quite wrong; and your dog was quite right in assuming me to be a trespasser. May I," he added, insinuatingly, "push my trespass a stage further, and beg for a few minutes' audience from Mrs. Lindsay?"

"I don't think my sister will see you," answered Violet, curtly, for the man's manner struck her as somewhat offensive. "She has people at luncheon."

Mr. Jarvis's countenance fell. Time was of importance, and he could not afford to go away and call again on the morrow. "I feel sure," said he, "that Mrs. Lindsay would receive me if she knew the nature of the communication which, unhappily, it is my duty to make to her. It refers to the gentleman—or, perhaps, I ought rather to say to the man—calling himself Mr. Staunton."

"What!" exclaimed Violet, in unconcealed delight; "is Mr. Staunton not Mr. Staunton, then? I knew already that he was not a gentleman."

"I am sorry to say," replied Jarvis, solemnly, "that he is neither. In fact, not to mince matters, he is an arrant rogue, who has shamefully deceived not only your sister, but many other persons, myself included. Last winter he called himself Lord Charles Templeton, and took in the whole society of Florence; this year, as you are aware, he has selected Cannes as his field for operations, and has given himself out as a cousin of Lord Bellingham's, with whom, I need hardly tell you, he is in no way connected."

Violet drew in her breath. She was sharp enough

to perceive that the individual who addressed her was not one of those witnesses whose word is sufficient to carry conviction with it, nor did he look as though any action of his was likely to be prompted by motives of pure benevolence. "I suppose," said she, "that you can prove the truth of what you say. If you can't you won't be believed."

Mr. Jarvis tapped his breast-pocket lightly. "I have proofs here," he replied, "which cannot be disputed." Then—for it was no time for false delicacy—he sighed, and added, "Unfortunately, I am not able to surrender these proofs without some equivalent. What that equivalent shall be I leave entirely to Mrs. Lindsay's generosity to decide, only mentioning that I am a poor man, and that the loss of the three hundred pounds of which this miscreant has robbed me has left me almost a pauper for the time being. Of course, I cannot expect that the full extent of my losses should be made good; but—"

"Make your mind quite easy," interrupted Violet, with superb contempt; "we will pay. If the proofs are genuine they are well worth three hundred pounds. Please come into the house, Mr.—You haven't told me your name."

"Jarvis," answered the other, endeavoring, not

very successfully, to conceal the delight with which Miss Brooke's indifference to expense filled him. "Perhaps, as Mrs. Lindsay has friends with her, I had better wait for her here. You might kindly mention that you had left me in the garden."

But Violet had already stepped through the open window into the drawing-room, which her sister and Mrs. Vane had just entered. "Beatrice," said she, "here is a Mr. Jarvis, whose pocket is bursting with proofs that Mr. Staunton is a sham from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. You can hear all about it for three hundred pounds."

Mr. Jarvis, a little embarrassed by this succinct account of himself and his business, advanced into the room, bowing to the two astonished ladies, and expressed his sorrow at being the bearer of evil tidings. "Nevertheless," said he, "it is a consolation to me to think that I am not too late to unmask a heartless scoundrel."

He then proceeded to unfold his indictment, to which Mrs. Lindsay listened with mingled disgust and incredulity. Hardly, however, had he begun to touch upon the delicate point of compensation when he was interrupted by a loud crash, as of falling furniture, proceeding from the next room, followed by a confused sound of voices and a shuffling of

feet, which seemed to show that a struggle of some kind was going on.

This was more than Mrs. Vane could endure. She jumped up, darted to the folding-doors which led to the dining-room, flung them open, and, glancing back over her shoulder at Jarvis, said, ironically, "Too late, my good sir! While you have been so obligingly calling out 'Stop thief!' other people have intervened and stopped him."

The tableau revealed by Mrs. Vane undoubtedly pointed to that conclusion, and the manner in which it had been brought about may now be briefly stated.

No sooner had the ladies left the luncheon-table than Arthur, returning to his place, remarked, in an unusually amicable tone, "Do you know, Staunton, Mr. Howland hasn't yet got rid of the old-fashioned notion that we English are a sober and serious race. If he saw us in our convivial moments he would change his opinion, wouldn't he?"

"I suppose so," answered Staunton; "but whether we show to advantage in our convivial moments is an open question. Personally, I think the modern young Englishman at such times rather a bore."

"He doesn't think you a bore, though; he looks

upon you as a boon companion—and small blame to him! I never saw any one enter into the spirit of the thing with more zest than you did the other night, when Bellingham was here.”

Staunton shrugged his shoulders. “When one is at Rome, you know—” said he. “I think I remember telling you at the time that I had not played the fool for my own amusement.”

“Well, at any rate, you gave a great deal of amusement to others; and really the game of Spoof is a capital game. I should like to introduce Mr. Howland to it. Mr. Howland, wouldn’t you like to learn the game of Spoof?”

Mr. Howland gravely bowed his head in sign of acquiescence.

“Then,” said Arthur, briskly, “I’ll show it to you. One of us—Staunton, let us say—marks, and the others each lay him five pounds to one. The way the game works will explain itself as we go on. It begins by one of us claiming some article of attire from him. For example, I claim his coat. Take off your coat, Staunton.”

“What in the world are you driving at?” asked Staunton, who was really mystified.

“You’ll see in a minute. Give me your coat; I’ll promise not to run away with it.” And, with

some mild application of force, Arthur managed to possess himself of the garment in question. "It is now your turn to claim something, Mr. Howland," said he.

"Well, sir," replied Mr. Howland, with a twinkle in his eye, "I guess it will be sufficient for my purpose if I claim the gentleman's right shirt-sleeve."

Enlightened by this significant demand, Staunton started up, setting his teeth firmly, and clutched at the coat which Arthur had laid down by his side. But the others were too quick for him. Before he could make a second movement he was gripped on each side by a man heavier than himself, and, after a tussle, in the course of which a chair was overturned and Staunton himself was thrown to the ground, his sleeve was forcibly rolled up, and a white scar, running the whole length of his forearm, was made visible.

"That will do," said Mr. Howland. "George Staunton, you may throw up your cards; you're over-trumped all round, sir."

It was at this juncture that Mrs. Vane, followed closely by Beatrice and Violet, and at a somewhat safer distance by Mr. Jarvis, appeared upon the scene. Staunton, pale and panting, had risen from the floor and was putting on his coat; Mr. How-

land, a little heated by the fray, was wiping his forehead with his handkerchief; Arthur, who had not anticipated quite so striking a *dénouement*, looked slightly abashed. For a few seconds no one spoke. It was Mrs. Lindsay who broke the silence.

“Arthur,” she gasped, “what is it? What is the matter?”

Staunton took upon himself to reply. “I am as much in the dark as you are,” he began; but stopped short, having caught sight of Jarvis’s wide-open eyes and waxed mustache in the background. He perceived at once that his former employer was right, and that it only remained for him to throw up his cards. “Brutus too!” he said, with a faint smile, and, passing swiftly through the group, no member of which attempted to bar his way, disappeared. A minute later the front door was heard to slam behind him.

“Is he to be allowed to make his escape like this, Captain Brooke?” asked Mr. Howland.

“He shall be helped to escape, if necessary,” replied Arthur, quietly. Then, drawing nearer to his cousin, “Go up-stairs, Beatrice,” he whispered, “until I get rid of these people. I will tell you all about it afterwards.”

She obeyed without demur, and, indeed, without reluctance. It was her nature to obey; and if Arthur had realized that a little sooner, he would never have been put to the painful necessity of causing a *fracas* in her house. The first thing that she did, on reaching her bedroom, was to sit down and cry; but assuredly it was not over the loss of Mr. Staunton that she wept. She had liked the man, and had believed in him; but she had never loved him, and had more than once secretly repented of the momentary rashness which had led her to accept his offer. Her one wish now was to escape from Cannes as speedily as might be, and hide herself. She felt that she would never be able to hold up her head again, and that the remainder of her life must be passed in strict seclusion. She was still engaged upon a melancholy scheme for her future manner of existence when a tap at the door was followed by the entrance of Mrs. Vane.

“Beatrice, my dear,” said that lady, “dry your eyes and go down to the drawing-room, where you will find Arthur Brooke ready to implore your forgiveness for having saved you from yourself. The coast is clear. Mr. Howland has discreetly withdrawn, after begging me to make his adieux and express his thanks to you for your hospitality; and

the estimable Jarvis has been dismissed with an intimation that any future demands on his part will expose him to the risk of being kicked. Only Arthur remains. You must try to show a little generosity, and not be too hard upon the poor fellow, although he has been in the right from first to last. It is provoking, I admit; but it isn't a reason for trampling upon him."

"It is a great deal more likely," answered Mrs. Lindsay, dejectedly, "that he will trample upon me. If he does, I shall be speechless; I haven't a word to say for myself. All this has been my own doing, and I have only my own stupidity and obstinacy to thank."

"Then don't be stupid and obstinate any more," returned Mrs. Vane. "A little of that sort of thing is all very well—especially when an opportune Howland or Jarvis steps in at the eleventh hour to save the situation; but, as one can't count upon such interventions being repeated, I think you and Arthur had better make up your minds to be happy together. The stupidity and obstinacy haven't been entirely upon your side, after all. There! I have spoken! Now good-bye; and if you have any good news to communicate to me to-morrow, I shall be glad to hear from you."

The good news to which Mrs. Vane alluded did not reach her on the morrow ; nor, perhaps, in assigning so early a date did she allow quite sufficient time for two scrupulous and sensitive persons to arrive at a foregone conclusion. But, sooner or later, for all their windings, the rivers reach the sea, and before another spring had come and gone Mrs. Lindsay had become Mrs. Brooke. Her happiness since her marriage has not been clouded by any awkward encounter with Mr. Staunton, who vanished from Cannes as abruptly as he had vanished from the Villa des Châtaigniers, and who has neither been seen nor heard of from that day to this, although more than one creditor is said to be keeping an anxious lookout for him. His fate remains a mystery ; but, since the world is wide and a fool is born every hour, there seems to be little ground for fear that a man of Mr. Staunton's ingenuity will ever suffer want.

THE END.

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
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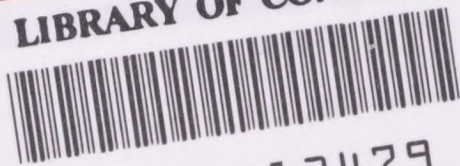
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